# BACKWOODS

*a journal of anarchy and wortcunning*

No. 1 Spring 2018

# BACKWOODS

*Edited by Bellamy Fitzpatrick, Fera Sylvain, and Thuggy Whiskers, PhD.*

*Backwoods is published twice a year by Enemy Combatant, publishers of anarchist books and pamphlets, with an eye to small scale, low-tech, and natural materials, as much as is possible within the bowels of leviathan.*

*Subscriptions are $15/year.*
*Individual issues are $10 ($5/copy for 10+ copies).*
*Please send cash or equivalent amount in postage stamps only (no checks).*

*Address correspondence, content submissions, and subscriptions to Backwoods, PO Box 238, Poestenkill, NY 12140.*

*Backwoods may also be obtained from*
*EC Publications*
*PO Box 1014, Jacksonville, OR 97530.*
*(Cash or postage stamps only)*
*Little Black Cart*
*www.littleblackcart.com*

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# Welcome to the Backwoods

We are writing *Backwoods* as a kind of suture in journal form, an effort to bring together in readership and communication two disparate radical tendencies in North America: those belonging to the anarchist milieux and those of the permaculture milieux. We aim to create a platform for dialogue, critique, and inspiration between and within these sets of radicals and thus bring to the fore fresh perspectives on the liberatory possibilities remaining in this late period of our shared crises in the bowels of Leviathan, our world-eating and enslaving civilization.

As people who each independently became aware of anarchism and permaculture almost simultaneously in our lives, the two have always seemed obviously complementary to us: anarchism is the critique, the vision, the social ethics; and permaculture is the design, the ecological ethics, the way of reharmonizing ourselves with our world. We imagined many others shared our view, elementary as it seemed to us.

As we met more and more radicals over our continuing lives, however, we were disappointed to find that our synthesis, while certainly not unique, appeared at least to be quite uncommon. The anarchists we met (at least those not mired in some veiled version of Marxism) often had penetrating critiques of society and economy but lacked an ecologically-sensible notion of *how we could actually live* freely and in a profoundly transformed way – at worst, their theory and praxis was confined to an unconscious millenarianism based

on nothing but the destruction of the existent. Permaculturists we encountered, meanwhile, tended to have the practical skills for transforming their relationships with their habitats and often had the key recognition that agriculture has been an exponentially-compounding error lying at the heart of our crisis – yet so many lacked the critical analysis necessary to understand how resistance can be recuperated into the dominant paradigm and so blithely imagined permaculture as the means to save neoliberalism from its own excesses, as though making permaculture products become the avant-garde commodities would make us free.

There are, of course, notable exceptions. Those in the green, or anti-civilization, anarchist tendency tend to have more ecologically-sophisticated perspectives; and individuals like David Holmgren and the late Toby Hemenway, major figures in the permaculture world, also identify or identified as anarchists, complete with more penetrating social critiques. In creating *Backwoods*, we wish to broaden and deepen these crossovers and connections. We see great opportunities being lost for discovering affinity and embarking on shared projects of liberation rooted in an anarchist understanding of human social relations and a permacultural understanding of ecology and subsistence.

For our first issue, we have devoted much of the content to establishing the basics of our theory, so that we may build upon a mutually-understood framework with our readership and contributors in the future. To that end, in 'An Invitation to Desertion,' Bellamy Fitzpatrick lays out a critique of civilization as a whole way of life dependent on slavery, ecocide, and alienation and sketches the beginnings of a liberated way of life based on exiting civilization and stopping its reproduction through daily life. Moving from the general to the specific, Fera Sylvain writes in 'On Subsistence and Slavery' about how the managers of civilization in Britain during the industrial revolution and the abolition of African chattel slavery developed a new form of more subtle, sublimated exploitation through the deliberate undermining of the possibility of subsistence outside of the dominant economy. Finally, our recent essays are juxtaposed with a transcript of a 2014 interview with late permaculture luminary Toby Hemenway, a wide-ranging conversation on similar themes of looking at the roots of our crisis and the possibilities for liberation.

Moving from critique to praxis, we begin what will be an ongoing column by Sylvia Wilde based on learning how to live an autarkic life in direct relationship with the land – 'A Forest Garden Primer' introduces the reader to techniques that will allow them to provide for their needs while simultaneously regenerating the soil and creating habitat for nonhuman organisms. Kanzan Kitsune's 'The Garden Path' gives a poetic glimpse of life on a successful example of such a project in Shizuoka, Japan.

Finally, we begin what will be a regular feature of reviews by looking at recent publications from the worlds of permaculture and anarchy, and we close with the first in a series of Backpage Rants, with our first ranter, Peter Lamborn Wilson, sharing his thoughts on the concept of "sustainability."

We are greatly interested in dialogue, feedback, contributions, and criticism. We also believe one of the easiest steps we can take to decrease our dependence on civilization is to refrain from treating the recent advent of the Internet as an inescapable necessity of communication. For these reasons, we ask that correspondence be sent via the at least less-technologized route of conventional mail:
Backwoods, PO Box 238, Poestenkill, NY 12140.

- *The Editors*

# An Invitation to Desertion

*Bellamy Fitzpatrick*

*Backwoods* is an invitation to those who can hear it, those who already know that something is deeply false and diseased about our way of life and who are looking for fellowship in truly confronting our crisis. This crisis is not one of surface issues, something that can be remedied with either well-intentioned social reform or rational tinkering with economic organization – it instead lies at the very core of our way of life: our values, our relations, and our ways of seeing the world. We are living through a great derangement, the ecocidal and immiserating culture of Leviathan, in which the majority are possessed by a slavish and consumerist ethic, a profound alienation from the non-human world, and a deep confusion built on cultural lies.

This piece is an introduction to the theory motivating *Backwoods*. As *theory* is *thea*, "a view," and *horan* "to see" (Online Etymology Dictionary), we are talking here of a *whole way of seeing*, an understanding of the world and how to act meaningfully within it. It is presented as an antidote to the reigning ideology of neoliberal republicanism, aiming to delve into the roots of our crisis so as to understand how to live as much as possible outside it and against it. Our ethos will be explicated further in this piece and developed continually throughout this journal, but, briefly, it is the following:

I. We indict the Civilization of Leviathan as a truly insane way of life predicated on the creation of States to enforce the enslavement of the many so that the parasitic few may acquire absurd wealth and influence. Such social relations are poisonous to all involved, being based on venality and coercion, ridiculous commodity fetishism, and the death of real human community through domination and atomization.

II. We denounce the world-eating mode of subsistence known as agriculture, with its effacement of ecosystems and their replacement with human domesticates, as a fundamental human error, one generative of mass extinction, soil exhaustion, war, and overpopulation.

III. We refuse the techno-industrial logic that treats the beautiful tapestry of the living world as just so much grist for the mill, as an unliving "resource" to be "developed" – that is, to be endlessly plundered and paved, extirpated of life, and replaced by parking lots, factory farms, waste dumps, extraction sites, and our apartment complexes and offices that fittingly resemble battery cages.

IV. We reject the meaninglessness of modernity that has produced perhaps the most humiliated, dislocated, deskilled, distracted, lonely, unhealthy, and unloved people that have ever lived.

V. We champion anarchy: the freedom that comes from conscious self-ownership and voluntary relations of mutuality with our human and nonhuman kin in small, autarkic, face-to-face communities based in a regenerative relationship with the land and the whole of the nonhuman world.

VI. We call for the application of knowledge gained from both traditional wisdom and modern ecology to the pursuit of modes of subsistence that

are harmonious with the world that sustains us: foraging, hunting, fishing, and forest gardening.

VII. We espouse a Neo-Luddism that consists of eschewing toxic and stupefying technologies, learning well-rounded skill sets for furnishing a living, and exploring and reviving traditional knowledge, skills, and forms of healing.

VIII. We embrace the vivacity of deeply ecologically harmonious ways of life and the sense of place, presence, and fulfillment that comes from nourishing and being nourished by an enveloping, living world full of consciousness and agency.

To begin communicating our philosophy to those who can hear it, this invitation to the desertion of Leviathan's entrails will consist of: 1. a brief examination of our crisis, which occurs at the levels of human social relations, broader ecological relations, and within the mind of the individual; 2. a frank recognition of the fact that the political realities of modern nation-states mean they can only perpetuate the crisis, not rectify it; 3. a short analysis of the alternative political ideologies of the Left and the Right, revealing that they, too, are incapable of addressing the heart of the issues afflicting us; 4. a look at anarchism, the most radical political tendency, and how even most of its forms fall short of our goals; 5. an introduction to the theory of anti-civilization anarchy on which *Backwoods* is based; 6. and, finally, a first glimpse of the implications for praxis of our perspective: desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation.

**The Crisis of Modern Civilization**

The vast majority of human beings living on Earth today have extremely little control over their lives and shared world. The ways in which we eat, gain shelter, and make a living are largely decided for us, overdetermined by existing social norms that we can influence only minutely, allowing us only a little room to maneuver in decisions about how we want to live and what values we want to pursue. Most of us eat food from grocery stores or restaurants, grown in distant places we will never see under unknown and uncontrollable conditions. We rent or take out a mortgage to find a home we did not build with neighbors we did not choose and must labor immediately and continually to pay for it. After going from place to place to beg for the opportunity to sell our time, touting our value with a piece of paper that summarizes how compliant and productive we are, we are rewarded by surrendering what is produced with our labor, how our labor is performed, and what is done with the product afterward.

The cycle of life seems to confront us like a blurred, harried race. From childhood, most of us are indoctrinated in compulsory government- or corporate-run schools where we are taught false or misleading histories, trained to be obedient to closely measured linear time, and inured to peer competition in the performance of duties issued by authority. In adolescence, through schooling, socializing, and propaganda, most of us adopt the religious, secular, and/or political ideologies with which we are bombarded that make our reality seem desirable, appropriate, or at least inevitable. Besides the jockeying for selling one's labor mentioned above, what is called success in adulthood for many is vying to exchange the terror of being alone for the sanctioned isolation of the nuclear family, that reproductive unit that allows the cycle to begin anew. Elderhood completes this humiliation, as one's inability or unwilingness to continue laboring often means increasing social irrelevance and impotence that commonly ends in being tended to like an invalid by hired strangers.

What is commonly called our *freedom* consists of only the most trivial and useless forms of freedom: the freedom to vote for some of one's rulers among predetermined and highly similar

political candidates, the freedom to choose among commodities that shriek at us with their labels and advertisements, the freedom to escape presence in one's own life through a vast menagerie of pornography, television series, films, and - most recently, at the furthest outposts of moronizing innovation - virtual reality and sex robots.

As we modern slaves – for we do, as we shall see, truly deserve that perhaps inflammatory title – struggle to assert some sense of agency in our own lives, the wider world engulfs us as a vast and variegated, almost unfathomable crisis. Our crisis is multifarious, a web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing subcrises – ecological, social, economic, psychic, philosophical – that not only immiserate our lives and poison our bodies, but, at this late stage, now threaten the integrity of the whole biosphere, that complex association of organisms and their habitats that encompasses the Earth and gives to it the richness of life in its beautifully simultaneous unity and diversity.

Our ecological crisis is one of accelerating biocide that nearly defies imagination. Because of our technopathological culture of agriculture, urbanicity, and industrialism, species are going extinct at a rate one thousand times faster than the normal, background rate (De Vos et al.). Forebodingly, only the great mass extinctions in the history of the Earth compare to this rate of death, and the signs of its severity surround us. The soils are becoming lifeless (Moss and Scheer) and washing into the sea (World Economic Forum), when they are not being entombed beneath pavement (Brown). The oceans are becoming acidic (NOAA), devoid of coral (Eyre et al.), and emptied of fish (Tanzer, et al.). The air is becoming increasingly carcinogenic (WHO) and extinguished of insects (Hallmann et al.). The more pessimistic of climatologists are currently suggesting that we may be very near or past the point of setting off positive feedback loops that, once triggered, will unavoidably bring about dramatic temperature rises within the next few decades (Hall), and even the minimal goals of the more optimistic are not being met (Shibli).

As without, so within: the human psyche is collapsing as surely as the biosphere by which it is nourished. Depression, "the number one psychological disorder in the western world", abounds, afflicting more than 17% of Americans. Since the inception of unmitigated consumerism in the mid-20th century, there are an estimated ten times as many people suffering from depression, with the incidence more than doubling in the past twenty years (Pietrangelo, Elliott and Tyrrell), leading some psychologists to bluntly acknowledge depression as the quintessential "disease of modernity," as "humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an overfed, malnourished, sedentary, sunlight-deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially-isolating environment with dire consequences." (Hidaka). Fewer than one in five sufferers even seek help or acknowledge their condition – misery, perhaps, is seen as the norm as we expect less and less from life (Real).

Suicide, depression's catastrophic end, is the eighth-highest cause of death and also on the rise – among the middle-aged, it rose thirty percent from 1999 to 2010 (Elliott and Tyrrell). Undoubtedly, one of the most appropriate symbols of our time is the presence of nets below bridges and windows that cannot be opened on tall office buildings and hotels: the social planners anticipate the broken, hollowed-out worker or customer who decides one lonely night to finally end their existence, and they deny them even that freedom.

Meanwhile, empathy, that essentially human capacity to feel what others feel, has fallen at an accelerating rate in recent decades, while narcissism,

the defensive enclosure of the self by a false persona (Vaknin), has increased during the same period. This psychic bleaching is attributed by researchers to widespread social changes: an increased interest in accruing wealth, decreased frequency of reading, increased social isolation, fewer friendships, and, of course, a greatly increased use of technological gadgets (Konrath et al, Kristol, Zaki).

**The Politics of "The End of History"**

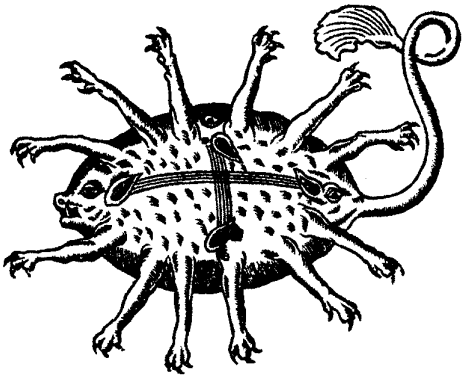
To those who take our shared crisis seriously, the politics of the *status quo* can offer no true solution. More than that, the very existence of politics, as a specialized activity separated from life, is itself a manifestation of the crisis: it is the willed abdication of the many from responsibility over their own lives and shared world; it is the modern secular theology (Schmitt), in which one begs for deliverance by a vast and invisible being known as the State through the prayer of voting; and it is, of course, the province of one of the parasitic classes we call *politicians*, the professionalized caretakers of the dysfunctional social order.

The dominant ideology of the modern political class flows from celebrated political scientist Francis Fukuyama's laughably millenarian declaration in 1989 that we had achieved "the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama). Fukuyama's intellectual descendants, the neoconservatives and neoliberals who now dominate both major political parties of the United States, congratulate themselves on ruling a society whose highest virtue is accruing wealth by plundering the living world and climbing to the top of corporate slave hierarchies in the ritualized, pacified war of all against all that we euphemize as "the free market". This ideology's elite are, variously, either so convinced of the greatness of their lifeway or so mendaciously self-serving that they forcibly spread the gospel of "freedom and democracy" to foreign lands through wars for "regime change."

Even among believers in legitimate political authority – that is, those who believe it is appropriate and desirable to have rulers so long as those rulers are good and just – rampant political corruption is an open secret, a fact recognized by the everyperson in quotidian conversation. The ancient habits of graft, influence peddling, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption are not only alive, but thriving – they are a perpetual, inherent feature of a democratic republic, which merely selects for ambitious, venal demagogues who engage in these practices rather than, as it is often imagined, *preventing* their rise. In our present era, the thinness of political legitimacy has reached the point that politicians routinely make speeches in which they deride the political process itself and openly refer to others as bought-and-paid-for political careerists. In this light, when it is often lamented by political commentators that only about half of the US population eligible to vote chooses to do so, we might instead ask why so many people still believe that we can be saved by *getting the right people into office*.

Indeed, the utter emptiness of the political process is lain bare from a cursory examination of the past few decades of U.S. presidential and congressional elections, during which the two dominant parties have repeatedly traded power, but nothing whatsoever has been done to forestall the implementation of newer forms of naked authoritarianism: murder by drone via presidential edict, aggressive persecution of journalists and whistleblowers, the incarceration without trial and subsequent torture of perceived enemies, the nearly ubiquitous surveillance of the population, the

normalization of "free speech zones" outside of which protest is not allowed, and the re-legalization of use of the military to enforce domestic law (Abu El-Haj, Mian, Risen, Sterne, Wolf). In 1918, historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler predicted that sometime around the year 2000, the most powerful Western nation, in an effort to resist its decline and destabilization, would become a new Caesarism – we are watching his prediction manifest itself (Spengler).



**The Failure of Alternative Political Ideologies**

As the desolation around the human being mirrors the desolation within the individual amidst the rise of this new techno-authoritarianism, the political alternatives to the *status quo* on both the Left and the Right, correspondingly, become increasingly ghoulish. With incredible foresight in the mid-19th century, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche predicted that the nihilism brought on by the long, slow disintegration of Christianity would cause people of the West to willingly flee into the prisons of totalitarian political regimes to embrace a new, secular theology as a salve for their existential malaise - the horrors of Communism and Fascism in the 20th century bore out his prediction profoundly (Nietzsche). Now, however, the politically active of the younger generations, with amnesic zealotry, are intent on repeating these failed experiments in the perfectibility of the human through the authority of the State.

Much of the Left, from more reformist to more revolutionary variants, now embraces what is variously called the ideology of *social justice*, *anti-oppression practice*, or, usually disparagingly, *identity politics*, in which our crisis is understood primarily in terms of institutionalized oppressor/oppressed dyads: White/Person of Color, Settler/Indigenous, Male/Female, Straight/LGBTQ, Able-bodied/disabled, and so forth. Through this understanding of oppression – a fusion of Maoism and vulgarized postmodernism, often under- or unrecognized as such by its adherents - members of the oppressor half of the dualisms are objectively and perhaps unavoidably dominators: not only their actions but also their ways of thinking are apt to reproduce this oppression, even if the individual in question consciously rejects and resists the system of institutionalized hierarchy as a whole. Conversely, members of the oppressed half of the dualisms are not only perceived as innocent victims but also objectively revolutionary figures well-placed to be the leaders of resistance: their status as the oppressed not only gives them a specialist knowledge of the system as a whole, but also means virtually any action that they take against their oppressors is justified and liberatory.

This dualistic analysis, while certainly getting at something genuine, nonetheless ignores or downplays the fact that the actually-lived experience of hierarchy is contextual and dialectical, not universal and straightforwardly top-down: the parasite is not *master* of the host, but engaged in a complex and nuanced codependence with it that necessarily includes both some level of submission and accommodation by the host and some level of weakness and incentivization by the parasite.[1]

An even worse and more obvious error of social justice ideology is its obfuscation that in our present reality the vast majority of so-called oppressors are themselves dispossessed and enslaved subjects. The European-descended American male, imagined as tremendously "privileged" in this world that is supposedly made for him, is himself likely the descendent of people who were serfs, who were dispossessed of land from which they derived their subsistence, and/or who were enslaved in factories. He himself is born into a world in which everything he needs to survive is owned, psychically and materially barred from him. He is no master, but only a differently privileged slave – and every large slave society has depended for its integrity on such tiers of privilege that divide the slaves against one another. The adherents of social justice ideology have thus internalized their rulers' gambit by blaming our crisis primarily on their fellow slaves.

The creeping authoritarianism of this ostensibly liberatory political tendency increasingly reveals itself in various ways that, while certainly not universal, are nonetheless common and broadly endorsed or tolerated by the Left: a vulgar understanding of post-structuralism that dismisses any pragmatic use of empirical inquiry as necessarily part and parcel of the oppressive Western apparatus whenever its conclusions contradict Leftist ideology;[2] a Marcusean willingness to legally or extralegally suppress the speech of individuals or groups denounced as objective oppressors by equating speech with violence and the suppression of such speech as legitimately defensive counter-violence (Marcuse); and frequent calls for the mass dispossession, subordination, and punishment of oppressor groups.[3] These authoritarian upwellings are, fittingly, entirely consistent with the history of authoritarian communist regimes.

The past few years have seen a sudden rise in a countercultural Right-wing movement roughly organized around the label Alt-Right, a hodgepodge of White Nationalists or "Identitarians," Neo-Reactionaries, conspiracy theorists, and outright self-identified Neo-Nazis. The Alt-Right ideologues present, and presumably sincerely view, themselves as genuinely countercultural or even revolutionary, as they are resisting the rise of "cultural Marxism,"[4] the suppression of free speech,[5] and, most importantly, the death of European culture and "white genocide" via mass immigration to Europe and the United States coupled with the currently low birth rates of European-descended peoples. With often messianic, mythic rhetoric, they imagine their victory as a kind of second European renaissance achieved through the creation of a European homeland, a "white ethno-state," in which there would be a flourishing of artistic culture, science, and moral and spiritual life.

Some of the social critiques of the Alt-Right – their criticism of censorship, of endless U.S. war under the military-industrial complex, and of the death of meaning under consumerism – are well-placed, though neither complete nor remotely satisfactorily addressed by their proposed solution of racial separatism. There is nothing inherently liberatory about racial nationalism, in spite of its ascendency in European form in the present politics of the Right and in virtually every non-European form in the politics of the Left, past and present.[6] Racially homogeneous societies historically have, currently do, and undoubtedly will continue to involve all of the horrors of civilization enumerated thus far, including slavery. Indeed, the sociologist and historian of slavery Orlando Patterson, in his survey of sixty-six slave societies, came to the perhaps surprising conclusion that racial similarity or difference had no effect on either how well-treated slaves were materially or

how much contempt their masters had for them (Patterson). Nationalism only obscures this reality by creating a false unity, an imagined automatic solidarity between parasites and hosts – nationalism is the illusory substitute of the real, intimate community of the small, face-to-face band societies in which we evolved.

At times, Alt-Right figures embrace an eccentric form of pessimistic authoritarianism presented as a kind of amoral, brutalist realism, as when Richard Spencer, in the course of the same conversation, observed that States are essentially institutions of organized violence, that all State societies have aristocracies (whether they acknowledge them or not), and that all States severely infringe on the autonomy of the individual – yet at the same time he asserted that States are inevitable and that he wishes to create a new one, even if that necessitates violence (Warski). This pseudo-radical analysis probes fairly deeply into the nature of authority, yet at the last moment pulls back to redeem it as inevitable and desirable.[7] Indeed, Spencer's vision of establishing a desirable society through an "ethno-state" is either deviously mendacious or hopelessly naïve, as – even if one were, due to an extreme White Nationalism, indifferent to the terror and misery that would undoubtedly be caused by an ethnic cleansing of all or part of the United States – the bureaucratic-police apparatus necessary to achieve it would assuredly develop its own inertia and become an institution of sustained tyranny over its European-American host population. The Alt-Right thus ironically parallels the vulgar communists who imagine, against evidence and intuition, that a *dictatorship of the proletariat*, having seized the State and used its authoritarian powers to secure the transition to communism, would ultimately then allow a *withering away of the State* to create a stateless society. The irony of this parallel dissipates with the clarity that both the political Left and the political Right have, from an anarchist perspective, always had more in common than they have had differences: both have the aim of Statecraft - that is, authority of the few and slavery of the many.

**The False Liberations of Minimalist Anarchism**

What of anarchism, that most extreme political philosophy of human freedom? Anarchism deserves great credit and consideration for its liberatory recognition that the freedoms of the individual and the freedoms of the community (or positive and negative freedoms) are not always and inherently mutually opposed; they can, in certain arrangements, instead be mutually enhancing. For this reason, we place our project firmly within the anarchist tradition, heterodox though it may be. Sadly, however, most anarchist tendencies are nonetheless bogged down in delusory pseudo-liberations.

The concept of social revolution has been with anarchism since its earliest days, being championed by such founding figures as Pyotr Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. On the ethical basis that the current order is based on nearly-constant violence – however mediated, ritualized, and pacified it might be through law, economic exchange, and social norms – many revolutionary anarchists have and do advocate for *attentat*, acts of symbolically powerful violence, such as the destruction of property or assassination of individuals perceived as key to the reigning order. Through this "propaganda of the deed," anarchists intend to show that the *status quo* is not invincible and inevitable, to demonstrate to the everyperson that their latent rebellious sentiments are justified and shared by others, and to promote and generalize rebellious behavior.[8]

But a sober look at the history of revolutions does not reveal a great expansion of freedom, instead only revolutions in the modes of authority. The American Revolution traded one aristocracy for another, eventually producing what is arguably

the most terroristic empire the world has ever known. The Haitian Revolution, a literal rising up of chattel slaves against their masters, led quickly from its success to the return of the plantation system they had rebelled against in the first place. The Russian and Chinese Revolutions traded the authority of *ancien régimes* for the tyranny of bureaucracy, surveillance, and police terror.

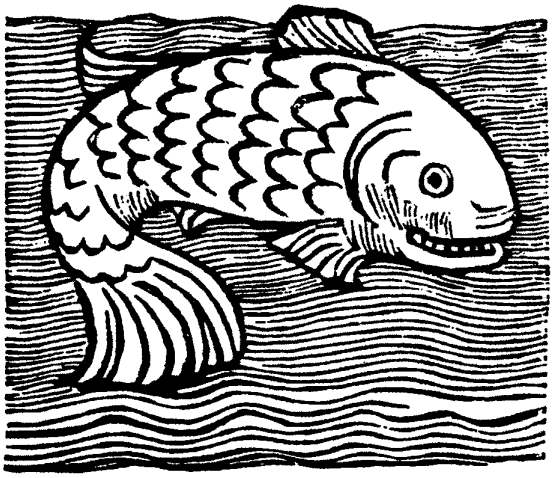
In an effort to distance themselves from this macabre history, many modern anarchists favor what they call *insurrection*, an entirely decentralized, leaderless mode of revolution based on attentat and propaganda. By avoiding the formation of formal parties or vanguards of any kind, the logic goes, there will be no authority to replace what is destroyed. The collapse of the social order, instead, will open the door for anarchy: the free life of human beings without authority.

But insurrectionism is afflicted with the most poisonous sort of magical thinking and optimism about human beings. For the insurrectionary anarchist's praxis to be achieved, there must be some sort of tipping point at which the rebellion of an anarchist minority becomes generalized, taken up by large numbers of people – it could perhaps be only a small minority of the population, but this would nonetheless involve an enormous number of people who are not currently anarchists or political radicals of any kind, only people in whom, it is imagined, some latent, undertheorized radical instincts exist, waiting to be tapped into by the symbolic actions of the active, self-realized insurrectionary anarchists.

While a great many people are, no doubt, more or less dissatisfied with any number of aspects of the *status quo*, it is a tremendous and unfounded leap to imagine that they therefore are latent anarchists, only waiting to be tapped by some perfectly performed propaganda of the deed. Rather, the vast majority are afflicted with what Jason McQuinn has termed "Slave Syndrome" – an extrapolation from the idea of Stockholm Syndrome – in that they are deeply conditioned to identify with and act in their social roles, sculpted to have only a few of the skills necessary for survival through their occupations, and very likely to be woefully unprepared for and terrified by the idea of radically reconstructing every aspect of society (McQuinn).

For most people, their dissatisfaction with the status quo consists of wanting more commodities, more leisure, more prestigious and less onerous jobs, better prospects in society for their offspring, and so forth – these are not people who dream of profound transformations of the dominant culture. At best, we might say some significant number of people want a society that feels, in some vague and undertheorized way, more *fair* or *just*, which might translate into a lower disparity of wealth and an expansion of the welfare state. But how many people actually crave to give up cars, air conditioning, Netflix, pornography, and modern medicine? If they are not willing, would the cadre of insurrectionaries then force such a change – or do they instead believe that they could recreate a society with high technoogy and luxury commodities that is, somehow, non-authoritarian and non-ecocidal?

Furthermore, the symbolic culture of society – its religions, myths, mores, notions of success, life cycle events, and so forth – provides most people with a much-needed shield of artificial meaning, protecting them from existential dread and the terror of death – they are thus attached psychically at a deep, partially unconscious level to their cultures: to bring an end to the expected functioning of society at large would entail coming to terms with the reality of one's life and choices as if for the first time, a potentially deeply traumatic experience.[9]



But even were the insurrectionary anarchist to somehow succeed in overthrowing the existent, they would still likely fail in their goals. Far from ushering in the freedom of anarchy, the creation of generalized social chaos that insurrectionary anarchists vie for will likely favor (and historically has favored) non-anarchist dissident factions, specifically the most ruthless and demagogical who wield the greatest ability and willingness to use organized violence. Whoever can quash their rivals and bring about security and access to resources for the many can bludgeon the population into going along with their new way of life whether many of them like it or not. The Leninists and Maoists whom the anarchists tend to despise – yet who are often in the streets with them during protests and riots – are quite honest with themselves and others about this and are willing to be those people. They also, unlike most anarchists, concertedly theologize their movements with a new collective mythos – through invocations of the People, the Revolution, the Communist Utopia, all of which are contortions of Christian themes[10] – to provide existential balm in a time of calamity. People who have been born and bred as slaves are far more likely to feel comfortable becoming a new kind of slave than to rise to the terrifying responsibility of freedom.

The revolutionary anarchist is thus self-negating in their praxis. By making a revolution their telos, they delimit liberation to an almost perpetually-receding future moment, confined in the present to destabilizing their prisons – yet, historically, even in their moments of apparent victory, they find that their past efforts have only aided in the creation of their new incarceration.

**Leviathan and the *Civitas***

If we eschew the illusions of reform and revolution, the politics of the Left and the Right, we arrive at a consistent critique and thus recognize our crisis for what it really is. Returning to the claim adumbrated at the outset, our crisis is not merely one of politics, society, or economics, but one of *civilization*; and our liberatory project is therefore not political, reformist, or revolutionary, but instead *anti-civilizational.*

To identify oneself and one's project as being *anti-civilizational* can come across as extreme, absurd, or even maudlin – what can it mean to be "against civilization"? Because of both the mutability of language and the ideological blinders nearly all of us accrue and so few of us shed, *civilization* means to many of us all that is good and decent about human sociality, typically contrasted with *barbarism* – thus, civilization is the rule of law in contrast to barbarism's arbitrary tyranny, it is orderly cooperation rather than the chaotic "war of all against all,"[11] it is high art and culture in favor of brutish struggle for mere survival, and it is scientific discovery and technological sophistication against ignorance,

superstition, and toil. Used in this commonplace way, *civilization* is more an ethical assertion – a claim about how one *ought* to live – than it is a descriptive one – a claim about how people *actually* do live. Even then, it is only a loose, obfuscatory sort of ethical claim, a kind of bromidic ideal, since every so-called civilization will necessarily feature a great deal of so-called barbarism.

In seeking to describe and understand our crisis, however, we will use civilization much more specifically and consistently. The term *civilization* comes from the Latin *civitas*, popularized in ancient Rome by the orator Cicero to describe the supposed implicit social contract to which all Roman citizens had agreed to as the basis of their coexistence. For Cicero, the *civitas* genuinely existed because people *believed* it existed: that they acted and thought in certain consistent ways in dealing with one another is all that civilization really was – it was, as we said at the outset, *a way of life and a way of seeing*. The *civitas* was thus not merely the city-state as a structure or as a population of citizens, but also the shared idea of the civic community, the mutually created and reinforced psychosocial construction of the city-state.

Following Cicero, by civilization, therefore, we refer to both the material and the psychic: civilization is sets of thoughts and gestures reproduced daily as a *whole form of life*, one that has developed only very recently and abruptly in the course of human existence. This way of life is characterized by the growth and maintenance of cities, with a city defined for our purposes as an area of *permanent human shelter with a dense and large population*. By being *permanent*, a city's population cannot move in concordance with local ecological cycles, meaning it has to subsist in spite of them, against them. By being a *dense population*, a city's inhabitants exceed the carrying capacity of their landbase, meaning they must import nutrients from a surrounding rural area typically characterized by agriculture as well as shuttle their wastes elsewhere lest they choke on them. By being a *large population*, citizens exceed the numbers possible for face-to-face and intimate community and therefore exist among strangers, whom they necessarily treat as abstract persons, not kin.

Psychically, civilized persons routinely *self-alienate* their life activity, taking aspects of their lives, powers, and phenomenality[12] and treating them as somehow alien or Absolute;[13] they then reify this imagined entity and submit to it as somehow superior or inevitable. In other words, an abstract idea dreamed up by an individual and reinforced through communication with others around them comes to be half-consciously or unconsciously treated as a concrete force. It is thus that we create this phantasmagoria of "fixed ideas"[14] that seem to dominate and dictate our lives: deities, nation-states, social roles, the economy, the nuclear family, and so forth. The young man who loves his country – which for him is a haze of ideals, history, and ethnicity – enlists, fights, and dies for the empire for whom he is a mere statistic. The mother, hypnotized by the ideal image of the happy family, slaves for her abusive husband and ungracious children, and then blames her own inadequacies when her actual life does not align with this reification.

In this reversal of the existentially-obvious state of affairs, these frozen concepts – which are merely abstractions, symbols, or models of actually-lived, sensual life – are delusorily treated as primary, more real and more powerful than the persons who in fact imagined and created them. Thus it is that, in civilization, people commonly believe themselves to be largely unable to create and live their lives on their own terms in free association with others, instead thinking and acting

in these highly submissive and stiffened manners while surrounded by strangers with whom they tend to ritualistically and half-consciously reinforce these shared reifications – just as Cicero imagined in a positive light with his concept of the *civitas*. In this way, all civilizations, past and present, have been and continue to be founded on a high degree of (often subconscious or semi-conscious) voluntary submission to authority.

A concrete example: the activity of *subsistence* – the creation of nourishment, shelter, medicine, and other essentials for survival from one's habitat – which could be done through freely-chosen cooperation with others in a self-directed manner and in an unalienated relationship with the non-human world that supports us all, is instead highly mediated through the confining psychosocial infrastructure we call *the economy*. Because so many of us so often treat our social roles as workers and our abstraction of money as *more real* than our creative powers and ability to communicate and cooperate, enormous numbers of us submit to dangerous, toxic, humiliating, or simply tedious and unnecessary (Graeber) work, surrendering our agency to managers and investors who gain wealth off of our labor, in order to create *commodities*, goods and services that are detached from those who made them and then more or less passively consumed by others for the subsistence and recreation whose possibility for direct obtainment was prohibited by the time and effort spent working in the first place.

Materially, to varying degrees, civilized persons are *dispossessed* of the means to create their lives on their own terms. Numerous features of the world into which we are born – nonhuman organisms, land, water, minerals – are always-already forbidden to us, having been ideologically recreated as State or private property, meaning people become dependent not on the living world, but on these mediating civilized institutions for their subsistence.

The history of civilization, as we will discuss throughout this journal, can be understood largely in terms of a not-entirely-linear, but nonetheless present, stepwise process of dispossession. In the very beginnings of civilization, with the emergence of the first lasting civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, and the Indus Valley, people were dispossessed of land and the fruits of their labor through taxation and theocratic ownership. As civilizations have deepened and broadened, most people have come to own and/or have access to less and less land. Common stewardship of land used for food, natural medicines, and recreation has nearly disappeared, and the little remaining is often closely managed by State agents. Many people no longer even own their own homes, while those that do almost invariably have tiny parcels insufficient for subsistence. Now, we live in a world where one can step outside their home – which may be only rented from someone else or be in danger of being taken from them by a bank or government – to drive on roads that do not belong to them into cities full of stores with needed foods and goods taken from those who originally made them and available only for a price. Nearly the whole world is claimed as property, and it can only be accessed by the many who need it by performing the submissive behavioral rituals of civilization.

Thus, through self-alienation and dispossession acting in concert, civilized persons are reduced to a highly dependent relationship with the psychic and material institutions of civilization. Their life activities are no longer felt as their own, but have instead become ritualized, stiffened, dissociated from them, as though they were all merely playing a role in a greater body – it is the body of Leviathan, the State, whose

function is to acquire and store material wealth, bring power and prestige to a few, wage war on competing Leviathans, and wreck the Earth all the while.

This situation, we contend, deserves the label slavery, with the recognition that slavery has existed in highly diverse, qualitatively distinct forms across civilized history: chattel slavery, concubinage, and indentured servitude, in which a person is more or less directly owned as property; debt, wage, and salary slavery, in which persons are parasitized indirectly through the control of money and property; and temple slavery, eunuchism, and social caste systems, in which persons are owned and Othered as a result of spiritual or religious belief systems.

Slavery is, for the purposes of our journal, *the sustained, ultimately violent parasitization of self-alienating and dispossessed persons.* This definition that we employ in this journal is an extension and modification of that on offer from celebrated historians of chattel slavery David Brion Davis and Orlando Patterson, who, despite their brilliance and erudition, cannot quite bring themselves to describe our present crisis as slavery – even when they come exceedingly close to doing so, going so far as to cite those who do – instead resorting to less inflammatory, more academic language like, "exploitation" or "bondage" (Davis 1966, Davis 1984, Patterson).

Thus, the anti-civilization critique goes far beyond that on offer by the Left, the Right, or the majority of anarchists. The old Left recognized class parasitization, but only recapitulated it through the creation of parties and bureaucracies; the new Left increasingly obscures even this basic insight under a panoply of particularized oppressions that are only the symptoms of a common slavery. The Right similarly obfuscates the issue by attempting to dissolve it into a common identity of nationalism. The anarchists come closest, but fail to sufficiently delve into either our crises' material origins in agriculture and industrialism or their psychic origins in self-alienation, instead positing that a secularized millenarian deliverance will solve our crisis.

As we will explore in more detail in future issues, the further corollaries of the anti-civilization critique reveal that agriculture and industrialism necessarily entail a continual despoliation of the land and a resultant constant need to expand alongside an advancing wave of habitat destruction. The need to perpetually expand, due not only to despoliation but also typically rising populations, inevitably brings civilized peoples into conflict with other peoples (civilized or not) who occupy land into which they are expanding, typically resulting in war, genocide, assimilation, and further enslavement.

Thus, civilization is born in dispossession and reification, maintains itself through slavery and organized violence, and entails war and ecocide. To truly value individual freedom and joy, kinship and love among humans, intimacy with the beautiful nonhuman world, and psychic peace and clarity entails anti-civilization anarchy, the abandonment of the civilized way of life.

**Desertion**

Here we return to desertion, our invitation at the outset, as the beginning of the anti-civilization praxis, leading further to autarky and reinhabitation. This praxis will be developed both theoretically and practically in the course of this journal, and what follows is intended only as a primer and a further introduction of the themes of *Backwoods*.

By desertion, we mean moving toward the abandonment of civilization, both materially and psychically. Because civilization and the State are reproduced daily primarily through the sub-

missive, undertheorized thoughts and gestures of the many – because civilization is first and foremost the *civitas* that we psychosocially create – it follows that we must unmake it through abandoning its lifeway. Material desertion means decreasing or eliminating dependence on civilized slave economies for one's subsistence – food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine – in favor of its obtainment through direct interface with one's habitat individually or through voluntary cooperation in free association with others. Psychic desertion means the abandonment of the reified and submissive civilized slave ideologies on which the daily functioning of society is based; the alienated and false relationships of social scripts and roles; and the stupeyfing succor of delusory religions, pacifying entertainment, and commodity fetishism. Replacing this civilized worldview, I suggest, would mean in a nutshell the adoption of a philosophy of conscious self-ownership and personal liberation, the pursuit of openhearted relations based in mutuality and voluntary association in common projects, and the embrace of the hard truths of life with a sense of existentialism and personal honor rather than the comforting illusions civilization offers us as carrots for our submission. It would mean further a deep identification of oneself as part of the flesh of the world, as necessarily tied to the life of all other earthly beings – depending on one's ontological or metaphysical beliefs, this might mean an acknowledgement of the material codependency of all creatures in the biosphere, or coexistence with them as part of the *anima mundi*, or world-soul.

To anticipate the reformist critic of desertion: An immediate corollary of this view is that efforts at reforming society must be rejected as ultimately counterproductive. As was touched on above, civilization cannot be reformed into a benign lifeway for either humans or the wider living world, as it depends foundationally on slavery and irrevocably entails ecocide. We will examine in future issues how the promises of so-called *green energy*, *organic agriculture*, and other technical fixes cannot fundamentally alter this corrupt foundation – they presently function only to obscure it.

Moreover, civilization depends for its stability on reformers of all kinds to protect its human constituents and nonhuman victims from its worst excesses: social welfare protects against crippling destitution and its resultant social chaos, the expansion of civil rights neuters potentially dangerous

underclasses and outlaws by allowing some of them to feel they suddenly have a stake in the preservation of the social order, environmental protection legislation means the poisoning and denuding of the biosphere to the point of uninhabitability will take a bit longer. The reformer, who might imagine himself the staunch social critic, is thus ironically civilization's most sincere and adroit guardian. Nearly the same can be said of the revolutionary, who, as was discussed above, is a kind of aggressive hyperreformer, refusing incrementality in favor of a dramatic and immediate transformation of civilization. But the history of civilization is a history of its being reformed and revolutionized – indeed, progressive social reform was part of the very earliest States.[15] We are officially told, and it is popularly believed, that we in the modern West live in the most reformed, enlightened, liberated civilizations that have ever existed (and in the United States, our civilization was born in revolution), yet these civilizations' ruling classes offer us nearly no influence whatsoever on policy decisions, surveil evermore of our lives, crush political dissent outside of narrowly permitted avenues, and have gutted the living world to nearly its last breath – such are the fruits of reform and revolution.

To anticipate the anarchist critic: desertion does not necessarily imply that all forms of *attentat* are to be rejected outright; but it does mean a profound reevaluation of what some anarchists have vaguely taken to calling "attack," which I feel has been greatly exaggerated in importance, often very misguidedly conducted, commonly easily recuperated by the parasitic social classes, and woefully overshadowing what ought to be the primary goals of desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation. It is only an empty bluff, or a suicidal and mass homicidal impulse, to prioritize attacking civilization when oneself and one's kin totally depend on its infrastructure and social relations for their survival.

It may very well be necessary and appropriate to resist more confrontationally at certain junctures, but much of anarchist activity these days is a repetitive exercise in self-righteous victimhood, a perpetual motion machine animated by a ressentiment-fueled martyr complex: rioting, aggressively confronting police, destroying public and private property – all of which accomplish next to nothing when civic and economic activity returns to normalcy one or several days later, but which often result in arrests, fines, incarceration, and injury for the activists involved. One attempts to assault directly an enemy who is best equipped and enormously accustomed to absorb and/or crush direct assaults, knowing that they will likely only inflict superficial scratches on their enemy while risking the total destruction of their lives – only a virulently self-sacrificial morality that places catharsis over wisdom could motivate such behavior. One loses, but feels vindicated, justified, and redeemed in their loss, and the oppression they receive only proves their dedication to righteousness and the turpitude of their enemies – and so the cycle continues.

At best, rioting may pressure politicians to pass certain reforms, which means one has fallen perfectly back into the trap of reformism. Again, there may be a time and place for certain very specific forms of sabotage and attack, but the greatest destabilization to the dominant paradigm will likely be caused by civilization's own self-undermining productive processes. In any case, desertion does harm the ruling order by depriving it of the resource on which it totally depends: the daily submission of slaves.

In almost all cases, desertion will not and cannot be quick or total, but it can nonetheless meaningfully be incremental and partial, pushing

toward ever-greater withdrawal as deserters come together, share skills and inspiration, and create informal networks of mutual aid. This journal is, among other things, intended as an organ for the creation of such networks.

**Autarky**

In reciprocity with desertion is autarky, the knowledge and practice of providing one's subsistence – again, food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine – for and by oneself in an unalienated relationship with one's habitat and in voluntary cooperation with others with whom one freely associates. Desertion, if it is not to be suicidal, is only possible in proportion with one's practice of autarky; and, in turn, a true engagement with autarky prefigures and implies desertion.

The economy of capitalist modernity, with its imposed division of labor and its thanatotic evisceration of the living world, pressures us into lifestyles that are psychically and materially distant from our habitats and into occupations in which we tend to learn only a small number of skills related to survival – and perhaps not even that. Pursuing autarky thus implies a rejection of this hyperspecialization in favor of a profound re-skilling, a regaining of the venerable and valuable skills of foraging, tending, tracking, hunting, fishing, preserving, woodworking, herbalism, and others that were, until very recently, so common among humans.

Recalling McQuinn's "Slave Syndrome" mentioned above, because the hyperspecialization of our bondage has meant that most of these skills have been so foreign to us for all of our lives, the prospect of learning them and doing all of the activities necessary for living ourselves may be intimidating, even terrifying, such that we may retreat into the false, cloying comfort of servitude in which we purchase blessed ignorance at the price of freedom. Autarky means contesting this submissiveness with the assertion that regaining these skills is not an unfortunate burden necessary for freedom, but instead an enriching of life and an enhancement of personal power – using, and thus strengthening, both body and mind in a variety of ways is a joyful fulfillment of our full capacities as organisms.

Throughout this journal, we will examine *forest gardening* as a methodology of achieving autarky. Through its practice, one can gain subsistence from the land without the ecocide and drudgery of agriculture, enriching the land for not only human, but also nonhuman, purposes and thus achieving a kind of agricultural counter-revolution. We at *Backwoods* are thus not only true radicals – in the sense of looking to understand and address the *radix*, or root, of our crisis – but also the truest form of reactionaries.

**Reinhabitation**

Reinhabitation is the outcome of desertion and autarky. Anarchist Emma Goldman referred to a liberated existence as "simpler, but far deeper and richer"[16] – I say that this is the essence of re-inhabitation. It is, in the most profound sense, *being somewhere*. It is shaping and feeding the landbase as the landbase feeds and shapes you, consciously being part of the interconnected senses and metabolic processes of one's eco-

system, coparticipating with other creatures to tend to the whole that sustains us all. Against the globalism of modernity, we assert a return to *place*.

Autarky is possible as a lone individual, but its solo pursuit is both more difficult and more joyless than when done cooperatively. Morever, as primates, we crave companionship and are most vivacious when nourished by intimate relationships – a sense of *place* requires a sense of belonging. The anthropologist Robin Dunbar, through a study of human behavior and neurobiology, has suggested that humans are cognitively equipped to function in group sizes of around one hundred and fifty individuals, a number that we seem to subconsciously gravitate toward in activities that require a high level of trust, efficiency, and self-organization to be performed well.[17] Agreeing with but going beyond Dunbar, I would say that it is only in sustained, regular, face-to-face contact that deep empathy can be fostered and maintained – this is how we evolved and how we have spent most of our existence as humans, in what anthropologists refer to as *band societies*. Humans are certainly capable of compassion and mutuality; but the tragic history of civilizations incontrovertibly shows us the human capacity for astonishing cruelty and wantonness when other humans and nonhumans can be treated not as sentient beings but as abstractions and aliens. Ours is the era of false communities: we are told, and popularly believe, that we are members of nations, citizens of cities, followers of religions – but most of us live among strangers, with shallow or non-existent relationships with those near whom we live, with whom we work, and whom we pass on the street.

To truly flourish as organisms in communion with our habitats, we must live in a way that nourishes the human psyche: in small, sustained, face-to-face, autarkic communities of kinship. In such a lifeway, it would be possible to know everyone's story, to count on one another, to live without fear of one another, and to be united in a common purpose as what one might call a band society, or, less preferably, a family or tribe.[18] Such a group would not be a suppression of individuality through stifling and incessant collectivism, but in fact the terrain on which a true union of individualities could grow, as the ethnographic record of such band societies suggests (Berezkin, Clastres, Kaczynski, Turnbull).

Averse to utopic thinking, we recognize as philosophical pessimists that human conflict and suffering are perennial – but this perspective only furthers the case for the superiority of this lifeway. Surrounded by lifelong companions, one can face misfortune with the support and compassion of loved ones. Facing the ineradicable difficulties of life and its hard choices, one can be challenged by friends to rise to the occasion, eschew weakness and excuses, and be encouraged to actualize their potential. A culture of ethics, honor, and accountability can only be fostered and maintained through the combination of loving and shaming that comes from sustained intimacy – our culture of late modernity, where one can disappear into anonymity and find a new social group at the first sign of conflict or disappointment, is the grotesque antithesis of healthful human relations. How much of human misery today is a result of loneliness, fear of abandonment, sexual poverty and jealousy, or isolation in times of crisis? Finally, the psychopathic and socially parasitic tendencies of human beings are best addressed by face-to-face, small-scale relations in which dominators and exploiters have no police and armies to manipulate and hide behind, no religious or political ideologies to rationalize their rapacity, and no mass anonymity to obscure to themselves their

own naked predaceousness – such parasites could be confronted immediately and directly by a group who could count on one another, which is indeed what happens in such cultures. Against the mass anonymity of modernity, we assert that reinhabitation implies a return to the intimacy of the *band society.*

Belonging and place cannot be truly realized unless and until human communities choose as groups of individuals to consciously relinquish the intoxicated fantasy of human supremacy and relate to the community of beings around them not as owners, managers, or stewards, but instead as co-creators. The earliest-known monumental religious architecture appears to depict humans mastering dangerous animals, and signs of agriculture and animal husbandry developed around the monument not long after its creation (Mann). If religion and agriculture began the human separation from the community of beings by suggesting that the human was spiritually distinct and materially capable of restructuring whole ecosystems for its gain, this separation only deepened with the Abrahamic religions that desacralized and profaned the living world in favor of the supernatural and otherworldly. The secularization brought on by Humanism and scientism deepened it further by positing the world was composed of dead, unfeeling, rationally manipulable matter to be put in service to human civilization. Thus comes our present era of the pathological rationalism of technoindustrialism and consumerism, where toxic lakes are created as byproducts for the production of smartphones with which bored, lonely people diddle away their lives (Maughan). The greatest fruits of our separation from our living kin have been mass extinction, existential anxiety, and a menagerie of stupefying entertainment commodities – against this hubris and death, we assert the return to a self-conscious *animality.*

**Our Invitation**

To put things only a bit simplistically, we must ask ourselves questions about how we truly want to live in the near future: Will the human being be nothing but a function, a mere epiphenomenon of vast political and social forces, a residue of commodity production and consumption? Or will the human being be an existentialist at the center of her own life, a creature who coparticipates in the creation and consumption of her habitat, an animal among a world she senses as kin? These questions imply profoundly different values, and the outcomes of pursuing them could not be more different.

Through the way of life called civilization, we have become parasites of one another and a cancer to the broader biosphere. The modern human is a tragicomic caricature: a creature who cannot so much as eat or shit without plugging into one of the apertures of a vast, world-eating industrial infrastructure; a creature whose capacities are daily diminished and who is evermore humiliated and moronized by the latest consumerist excrescence, from automated salt-shakers and "organic water" to hiring fake friends to appear in "selfies" taken by that apotheosis of anomie, the smartphone; and a creature for whom the emptiness and ennui of his life is so obvious and incontrovertible that it can only be drowned by ceaseless and shallow distraction. The gravity of our error has been plain for centuries; it is time to turn away.

The present situation is grim: the forces of the parasitic classes are vast, submission and resignation are widespread, and the biosphere is, by some estimates, already irrevocably in a mass extinction spiral. But whether we deserters are so fabulously successful as to initiate a widespread secessionist movement, or so insignificant as to make merely "pockets of happiness" that quickly pass away after our deaths, I believe the choice is

clear. It is a modern, utilitarian moral calculus that measures the value of a course of action in terms of its expected quantitative consequences, and thus elicits the dismissive scoff at the possible insignificance of a relatively small number of deserters scattered around the world. For many of the ancients, as well as modern iconoclasts, value and meaning are found instead in the individual's own sense of virtue, all the more so in the face of tragedy. Exactly what such a virtue ethic might be in this late period of civilization will be developed throughout this journal, but the values espoused throughout this piece are a first glimpse.

Thus, our invitation to all those who can hear it: Refuse the submissive values and false hopes of the dominant ideologies; follow the implications of radical critique – say and live what you know to be true. Refuse the slavery of being a mere appendage of Leviathan – take back your life. Refuse the cancerousness of technoindustrial-agricultural life – pursue mutuality with the living world and rediscover your animality.

**Notes**

1. For some excellent expositions of this theme, see the famous master-slave dialectic of Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the concluding chapter of Orlando Patterson's excellent *Slavery and Social Death*, in which he argues the biological concept of the parasite is the most parsimonious way of understanding relationships of domination and exploitation.
2. For example, through a watered-down and distorted version of philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of the épistémè of any era, which he understood as the usually-unconscious, a priori epistemology of an era – that is, the hidden assumptions within a society's discourses of knowledge that make it possible to make truth claims at all. In social justice ideology, this often boils down to shallowly denying the validity of any truth claim deemed as "oppressive."
3. Consider, for instance, increasingly bizarre and common cases like the autumn of 2017 Texas State University school newspaper publishing an article entitled '[white] DNA is an abomination,' or the April 13, 2017 Huffington Post publication of an article advocating for the global disenfranchisement of white men (which turned out to be a hoax article that they fell for and published).
4. "Cultural Marxism" is a phrase associated with a Right-wing conspiracy theory that there is an organized Marxist effort to bring Communism to the United States not through sudden, violent revolution, but instead through an incremental change in the country's cultural values.
5. Many Alt-Right figures have had their speech suppressed in various ways, including de-platforming at speaking events and bans and shadow-bans on social media platforms. To be sure, such suppression is not at all unique to the Alt-Right – similar suppression has fallen on the Far-Left.
6. Black Nationalism, Chicano or Latino/Latina Nationalism, Indigenism, and so-called Third World Nationalism have all been embraced in various forms by Leftists, at least since the formation of the New Left in the 1960s.
7. Spencer's maneuver is a good example of Roland Barthes' "Operation Margarine", in which one disingenuously and shallowly critiques something in order to ultimately redeem and defend it. Barthes details this phenomenon in a very short essay of the same name in his 1957 book *Mythologies*.
8. Exactly how much and what sort of violence is necessary or appropriate for social change has been debated fiercely by anarchists for the past century and a half, with positions taken ranging from pacificsm (e.g., Leo Tolstoy) to deliberate terroristic violence (e.g., Luigi Galleani).

9. This complex point is necessarily touched on only very briefly here. This phenomenon has been examined at length by numerous figures from different backgrounds, such as Émile Durkheim in *Suicide*, Peter Wessel Zapffe in 'The Last Messiah,' and Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death*, which led to the psychological concept of Terror Management Theory. I take up this specific issue from another angle in the essay 'Existential Cowardice: Submission as Terror Management,' printed in the forthcoming collection *The Prison Built by Its Inmates: Voluntary Servitude Revisited*, to be published by Enemy Combatant Publications.
10. The similarities among Left-wing politics, Secular Humanism, and Christian theology have been examined at length by many, probably most originally and incisively by Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner. For a more contemporary and approachable take on the influence of religion on politics, see John Gray's *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia.*
11. This is the phrase used by Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 book *Leviathan* to describe what he imagined as the brutish state of uncivilized humans – Hobbes favorably juxtaposed a voluntary surrender of freedom to a powerful sovereign State, Leviathan. We follow the lead of libertarian thinkers like Ernst Jünger and Fredy Perlman who use Hobbes' preferred term critically.
12. By phenomenality, I mean what is variously called consciousness or subjective experience, that is, life as it is actually lived and felt, one's own perspective with its sensory experience and inner life of emotions, thoughts, and imagination.
13. An Absolute is something imagined as a thing-in-itself, something that exists, in, of, and for itself irrespective of relations and perspectives, such as a transcendental deity, a god detached from the world we inhabit. My own philosophy is that no such Absolutes exist – they are dangerous philosophical delusions associated with ideologies of slavery.
14. This is the preferred phrasing of Max Stirner, whose 1844 book *The Unique and Its Property* is an early and excellent investigation into the authoritarian nature of reification. For a more contemporary take, see Jason McQuinn's 'Critical Self-Theory: The Non-Ideological Critique of Ideology' in the third issue of the journal *Modern Slavery* from C.A.L. Press.
15. Consider the reign of Urukagina, the *ensi* (ruler) of the city-state of Lagash in 24th-century B.C. in Mesopotamia, who might be civilization's first progressive reformist authoritarian.
16. To be clear, Emma Goldman's comment was particular to her vision of life for liberated women, but it applies just as well generally.
17. Dunbar initially arrived at the number by noticing a positive relationship between the neocortex size of primates and the size of their social groups – he posited that the relationship may be causal and extrapolated from it that human neocortex size suggested a stable social group of one hundred and fifty. Subsequently, he bolstered the theory with empirical data based on numerous human groups that maintained relationships and/or worked together closely across space and time, from military units to factory workers to the number of holiday greeting cards families send. Dunbar's theory has come under criticism on a number of fronts that strike me as picking out serious weaknesses, such as the observation that social insects, with relatively tiny brains, live in societies with their own sophisticated micro-politics – my position does not depend on it being literally true, but only on its being a conceptual guidepost for what is also known phenomenologically.
18. Band, although colloquially odd, is the preferred term among anthropologists for small, face-to-face communities, and it is thus the term we will use in *Backwoods.* Although terminological distinctions are not entirely consistent across anthropological literature, tribe is generally used to pick out groups sufficiently large as to no longer be bound by face-to-face communication and kinship ties, and instead bound through small political institutions and roles like councils of elders, big men, or chiefs – for us, such groups, while still decidedly anti-authoritarian relative to States, are already past the point of anarchy and not part of our goal. Going beyond anthropological accuracy, "tribe" and "family" are to us laden with New Age and cult associations – band is thus decidedly the best term.

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PARADISI IN SOLE
Paradisus Terrestris.
Or
A Garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers which our
English ayre will permitt to be nourished vp
with
A Kitchin garden of all manner of herbes rootes & fruites
for meate or sause vsed with vs
and
An Orchard of all sorts of fruitbearing Trees
and Shrubbes fit for our Land
together
With the right ordering planting & preserving
of them, and their vses & vertues
Collected by John Parkinson.
Apothecary of London.
1629

# Pockets of Happiness

*Toby Hemenway in conversation with Backwoods*

*Toby Hemenway was an author, educator, and activist of permaculture, a system for designing human habitations and meeting human needs based on working with and as a part of one's ecology. Before his death by pancreatic cancer in 2016, Hemenway made himself well known and appreciated for such books as* Gaia's Garden, *the best-selling permaculture book in North America, and lectures as 'How Permaculture Can Save the World and Humanity, but not Civilization.' We appreciate in particular the critical gaze he brought to the permaculture milieu, taking such heterodox positions as saying urban life[1] and agriculture must be abandoned, that permaculture allows us to decentralize to the point of eliminating the State, and that permaculture should not be thought of in terms of a social movement.*

*What follows is an interview I conducted with Hemenway in March 2014, with my erstwhile co-host Rydra Wrong during my time hosting the podcast* Free Radical Radio. *As is referenced below, I had just had the good fortune of hearing Hemenway speak three times – two times at the 2014 Eco-Farm Conference in Pacific Grove, California and again at the University of Santa Cruz California – and I was pleasantly surprised to see him boldly state in his 'Toward a Horticultural Society' lecture at UCSC that agriculture was a mistake, that it contributed to a way of life that tended to generate authoritarian human relations and ecological devastation, and that it had to be abandoned in favor of another path. I immediately spoke to Toby after the third lecture and arranged the interview transcribed below.*

*The transcript is very lightly edited due to poor audio quality in the original recording making a few of Hemenway's phrases indecipherable – these edits are noted by brackets.*

- Bellamy Fitzpatrick

Bellamy Fitzpatrick: Before coming to permaculture you worked as a geneticist, correct?

Toby Hemenway: Right.

BF: Some might consider one a natural extension of the other, since they're both concerned with understanding and working with natural systems; but we think there's a kind of value difference where with the scientific approach of genetics there's a push towards reductionism, understanding something by reducing it – and I would argue there's a kind of element of control, an aim at control – whereas with permaculture, at least we like to think that we're working *with* natural systems, and it's more participatory. So, what was that transition like for you, and do you feel similarly or differently to what I just described?

TH: Right. Well, I definitely would agree with that, that a lot of scientists have the control of nature as really the goal in a lot of ways. Like a lot of people, they have a lot of baggage to unpack, whereas now we... I really had the good fortune to be a teenager in the sixties, which sort of derailed me, often in a good way. And I had a real conflict with a part of me pretty early on that I didn't really want to contribute to this culture, and then part of

me..I was raised as an east coast WASP, so, I mean, there's a Hemenway street in Boston and there's [another place bearing his family name and] that just left me with a lot of stuff to kind of question. But I loved nature, and I wanted to make my living or at least spend my life trying to understand it – but I'd also been bred to want a high status job, so I had that conflict, and molecular biology was the way to do both. You know, I could study nature, but I could also say "Well, I'm a molecular geneticist, and isn't that fancy and cool?" But I nearly didn't really make the goal, as I kept dipping in and out of science a bunch of times to do brick-building and woodworking... And then I got hired by a little biotech start-up [...] which was really..it was a lot of fun. [I was working with] brilliant scientists, and [there was] just a wonderful environment. And we were trying to use the body's natural defenses to fight disease – but then we discovered something useful, and it turned into a drug company in itself and like, that's when I really started to go, "Okay, you know, this isn't going to work; this job is going to make me miserable." Fortunately, we had just moved to the country, my brand new wife and I, outside of Seattle, and so I was playing hooky from work, looking at books on homesteading and Bill Mollison's *Permaculture: A Designers Manual* had just come out and.... Discovering that was like, it suddenly put all these pieces together that I'd never been able to make sense of, why I liked all of these different things that never fit together, and permaculture made them fit together. And it was just a huge relief, and it gave me a framework for getting out of, you know, the rat race [...] permanently. That was 1993, and I've never been back... Once I was able to do that, it was actually a very natural and easy transition for me – but I had to have a tool kit to give me a place to go, and permaculture gave me that.

BF: That makes a lot of sense. So, I guess the follow up to that would be... Can you talk a little bit about the perspective that you're adopting? I mean, when you're interacting with a permaculture system, do you find yourself thinking of things in that reductionist way, that kind of scientifically-minded perspective, or has permaculture started to bring you over more to a perspective of emergence and systems rather than individual organisms?

TH: You know, permaculture has really helped me make that shift. I started getting interested in whole systems thinking when I was in college, but there was very little of it that was really acceptable. And, so, learning the scientific tools kind of helped me in a way – learning that reductionist tool, so I've got that toolkit – but understanding holistic thinking and whole systems thinking in complex adaptive systems and emergence and all of that really gave me a whole new toolkit that I was kind of poised to adapt. I think my mind is just wired to think more in whole systems, so it was kind of a great relief to stop killing stuff to learn about it.

BF: Yeah (laughing)!

TH: I realized that there were other ways that could preserve the living entity and preserve the ecosystem, and you could learn from that. It was kind of a great relief to get better at whole systems thinking and permaculture gave me a whole set of tools for doing that.

BF: When I went to see you speak, I was really excited by your horticultural society thesis. I was coming into things from the anti-civilization anarchist perspective that very much vilifies agriculture, you could say – sees it as the basis for work, as the basis for hierarchy – and in your speech you were making a lot of the same points. In particular, I liked the bit where you said once

you have a surplus, you need lords to parcel it out, you need police to protect it, you need bureaucrats to measure it, and so forth –and I think without qualification you could say that your thesis there was really deeply radical. So, how do you imagine that transition taking place, as important as it is, when we know there's so much vested interest backed by force in the form of modern nation-states and the globalized agribusiness? Do you think that society can peacefully transition, have an epiphany, and recognize the insanity of the present setup – or what's it going to take?

TH: That's the big question. You know, I believe in the power of intention, so I try to envision a peaceful and sane transition, although I think, statistically, there is only a modest chance of that happening, and I think with events going the way that they are that the chances are probably getting even smaller. But my own...the thing that I believe in is starting from where we are now. You know, this is where we are so...what I'm trying to do is to create alternatives. I don't really envision an orderly transition so much as I find it the only thing that I can justify working for. And what I'm trying to do is to set up the conditions for that transition to occur. I feel like I am better suited to doing that than...well, I *understand* how to do that more than I understand how to dismantle corporate rule. I think there are other people who are better at that other stuff. I certainly understand the desire and the rationale behind forcible removal of these destructive systems...I guess that's a code phrase for insurrection or violence or whatever you want to call it, but it's just that my own ethical stance can't...it doesn't really let me go there. Violent revolution doesn't have a really good history, unfortunately. I think in America we look at our revolution, and that one turned out relatively well in that...granted we just replaced one elite with another, but it wasn't a bloody awful mess. Most of them aren't so good, so I am trying to create the conditions for a more peaceful transition even if that's not the way that it goes. I would like to create what I call pockets of happiness, you know, places where there is less misery, places where there are good things going on. And I feel that the more good places we can create, then the less bad places there will be. There are going to be a lot of bad places, but I'm going to try to be in a good one and I'm going to try to create, well, enough places for you, and for everybody else, and for everybody listening and for everybody...every one of my clients who want to be in one of those places. But there are still going to be plenty of places that we won't want to be out there as well. I can't work for that...I have to work for more positive work.

Rydra Wrong: I was reading one of your essays...and you talked about it a little bit earlier...about how, I think, when you were in your teens you said something to a friend about how you didn't want to contribute to society anymore, or ever again, and I was wondering, besides what you're doing, what else do you see people doing that you would say isn't contributing to civilization or to this agricultural system and capitalist system that we have, that is, something positive?

TH: Right. Well I think...I'm not all that much on what you would call self-sufficiency, but I think..I don't think that that takes advantage of the connections between people that can be really powerful, so, one of the things that I think can really help is community self-reliance. Creating networks of people who are...who understand that it doesn't take that many people to create a small autonomous unit that is less dependent on these larger systems, and that if you can get anywhere from ten to two hundred people or so together that

you can really take care of each others' needs pretty well. So, in that direction where people are understanding the power of networks and the ability of a group of people to meet one another's needs and not be so dependent. And a lot of those systems can kind of look like...what would they look like now? Like a hundred people can self-insure to have medical coverage and things like that. While we need to create those kinds of institutions but make also.... In a sense kind of turn our backs on the [...existing institutions] Creating a community network is a really important step. It's harder to do it alone, and I think groups of people are a great deal more powerful. And there are things you can do without attracting a lot of attention to yourself, you know, "Hey, we're just a CSA, we're just some sort of a sharing co-operative," you know, but it can be very radical and subversive groups of people.

BF: I'm curious. I guess I want to pry you a little bit. You said you understand why...or you understand the rationale, I think you said, behind the dismantling approach but your own ethics won't let you go there. So, you're holding two almost contradictory things in tension: you're not opposed to other people doing it, but you don't quite want to go there yourself... Can you flesh that out a little bit?

TH: Yeah, well, I'm a believer in using every appropriate tool that's in the toolbox. That's really one of the things that I've learned about from permaculture is that we have a lot of different tools and many different ways of accomplishing things. And I think at this point that we don't know what's the best tool for dismantling corporate rule or eliminating civilization here. I don't think we've got enough data; it hasn't really been done before, so we don't know what the best tool is. And it may be that – whatever you want to call it, insurrection or monkey wrenching or whatever you want to call that – is the most effective way to do it. It's just one that I'm not particularly suited for. And I'm worried about it in that there are institutions...I mean, the US military loves violence, the US government loves violent opposition and corporations love opposition. They want to be opposed directly and competitively, and they're really good at fighting back – so I'm concerned about just how viable that is, but I also feel like it's a tool in the toolkit. Other people are certainly trying it, and I don't have enough information to say "No, that's not going to work, that can't possibly work." It might work. It might be the way to do it. On the other hand, maybe working with local government is a way to do it, there may be other ways to do it...or creating self-reliant communities is a way to do it. There are lots of different good tools that we could be using, and, until we get some data as to which one is making the most progress, I think we might need to keep trying a lot of different ones.

BF: I guess that gave us a bit of a segue there: I wrote you in an email that I was a bit surprised, after you were saying things like we need to move away from civilization and that agriculture was a mistake, seeing also that some of your own personal work did involve working with local government in certain specific situations, so...I guess I want to pry you again and say: do you see that as a contradiction? Does working with local government legitimate and reinforce the idea of government, therefore the idea of civilization, mass society, and agriculture? – or do you see this as a pluralistic, pragmatic kind of approach of "Let's do whatever we can," and, I guess, taking your rhetoric, use all the different tools and see what works? Is that your line of thinking, or...?

TH: It's somewhat like that. I think that you can work on the system without being from within it. What I mean by that is that people are at various levels of awareness, and when I look at these institutions like government or the military...I had a chance to work with a group of soldiers a while ago, and I think I got to a few of them. So I see individuals rather than...or I see these institutions as being made up of individuals, and if you reach

enough individuals, you can kind of change the center of gravity. People are at different levels of awareness, and you've got to meet them at the level of awareness that they're at. Again, in permaculture we talk about meeting people where they are. The systems thinker and biologist George Hoffman talked about "adjacent possibles". So, what that means is, in human terms, *where is it possible for you to go in one step from where you are now?* And you can only move one step at a time in your consciousness or physically or whatever it is so – where you are now, what is possible? What are the steps that are possible? What are all the different ones? Then, when you move one step, a whole group of new adjacent possibles arise that weren't possible from where you were. So, what I'm trying to do with...if there's someone who feels like their next step to freedom is to be growing some of their own food, I'll help them grow some of their own food, and if someone in government...if they are...sometimes these folks are unconscious and you have to kind of manipulate them without them knowing that. So my town, Sebastopol, California has a mayor who – he's gay, and he [...is] pretty far down the [countercultural] path – so I think he's got adjacent possibles that I like. He is not really enthralled with the current culture so he is someone who we could work with and say, get community gardens in town [or fund other projects] or... If there is a public official who is not...say he's business-oriented, then you might say something like, "Well, how about if we pass the cottage industry bill that will allow people to become entrepreneurs more easily?", meanwhile then people can actually grow a little produce that they can sell or raise animals that they can sell or sell raw milk or something like that. That's going to help them detach a little bit. The business-oriented mayor may still be stuck wherever he is, but we can work on him and help him move other people without him knowing it. That is what I mean by using a lot of different tools. You have to reach people where they are and try and move each one a little bit, and as a whole then you start to shift the center of gravity of the culture and start to wake up enough people. Because what I think we need is a critical mass of people who understand that they have been enslaved and there are other ways of living. Right now there is not a critical mass, there are very few people. My job is trying to wake a lot more people up.

BF: Do you view yourself mainly as a kind of propagandist, then?

TH: As a propagandist? Well, I think that would be one way to describe it (laughing), though it may not be exactly the word I would use. I'm an advocate for a lot of what is on the anti-civilization agenda. I'm trying to make people aware of, what I consider as, some real facts. And one of the ways that I do it is by getting people to look at agriculture and look at the damage that it is doing and start there. I even work with farmers sometimes and talk about how farming really has a terrible ecological cost – where there is a farm there is not an intact ecosystem. And people start to get that. I find very concrete methods like getting people to look at agriculture and to look at the facts to try and shake them up a bit [...] through methods that they can't really argue with yet.

BF: During your horticultural society speech you talked about the fact that horticultural peoples historically have been kind of written out of history, there's a kind of revisionism that's happened and even ones that you were naming like the Jōmon in Japan..I was looking into that a bit and saw that they're often referred to as a hunter-gatherer society. What do you think motivated this kind of revisionism of erasing the collective memory of horticultural peoples? Is it just a kind of chauvinism with the assumption that agriculturalism is a superior form of society, so we don't even need to pay attention to these people; or is it that agriculture induces this kind of cultural fear that this must be the best of all possible worlds, otherwise why would we be doing it? What do you think happened there?

TH: I think that some of that is happening. That a lot of it is just cultural chauvinism, that agriculture just seems so superior, you domesticate things then you realize you've got a lot more control over your environment and that's wonderful, and why would you just stick with horticulture when you can move all the way to agriculture. There's just an assumption that agriculture has got to be superior. But also, history gets written by the victors, and it gets written from their point of view, so I don't know if it's really a conscious effort to discredit alternatives. But I am actually increasingly starting to take the view that there has been a concerted effort by elites to maintain the slave state for the last ten thousand years. And it may not be

completely conscious, but it's just that they know when they've got a good thing going. I've just been listening to an audio book about the High Middle Ages, and what I'm hearing from looking at all these petty rulers all over Europe in the thirteen and fourteen hundreds...they're all psychopaths! Most of the nobility in these various States, all they wanted to do is fight the other nobles around, and they didn't care about what was happening to the people, they didn't care about the welfare of the people...other than for taxes and being able to raise militia. So, this power structure has fostered the rise of power-mad, I mean, literally *mad* people, and those are the ones who get to write history. So, I think there has been a concerted effort to keep most people weak and poor, and part of that is to tell this story that agriculture is great and, you know, the lions are going to come and eat you if you don't build a big fence, and if you don't raise a lot of food you'll starve... So, there has been this kind of revision of history that wiped out any other way of doing it – and part of it is this Myth of Progress, and part of it is that it really benefits the people who run the show.

BF: You said that you were influenced by Marshall Sahlins when I saw you speak, and he talks about the "original affluence" of gatherer-hunters who were able to provide for most of their needs with a fraction of the labor – and he also imagines that the transition to agriculture was very much forced. I think it was Stanley Diamond who said there were only conscripts not converts when the transition to agriculture happened. From your own research, do you imagine a scenario like that, a kind of brute force that was then later solidified through cultural symbolism and myth and rationalized ultimately, as you said, with the Myth of Progress?

TH: Yeah, if you look at how agriculture has been propagated just within modern history it has usually been pretty violent. And, you know, since the methods that are used now were probably the methods that were used in the past.... And also when you look at the genetics and the spread of agricultural people, it's not just agriculture that spread, it's the agriculturalists that moved into new areas. So, they subjugated – or exterminated or outbred or whatever it was – people who used to live there, just as, if you look at the way European agriculture moved into the New World, it was pretty ugly. And I think that is the way agriculture has moved. And there are records of forager societies or gatherer-hunter societies who were invited to take up agriculture, and they looked at it and said "No, thanks. We're not really interested." They saw where it was going. They saw what they were doing by doing that. So, yeah, I do think that it has been spread usually through conquest. And it just lends itself to conquest. Agriculture is really portable. It doesn't matter what the native environment is you just, you know, plow it over and plant your preferred crops there. It doesn't matter what culture or what ecosystem used to be there once you get rid of it and put agriculture there.

BF: One thing when you were advocating for the viability of the horticultural societies and the examples that you used, you talked about how they were culturally rich and produced works of art and... so, I guess that was one place where I saw you deviating significantly from the typical anti-civilization anarchist perspective. In a lot of that work, there's an equation of agriculture and hierarchy with the symbolic culture, that art kind of steps in to take the place of the immediacy and spontaneity and richness of a freer life, and we end up engaging in things like art as a kind of crutch to take the place of what used to be a more present life. But you seem to differ there and think that art

is, and symbolic culture generally is, a sign of richness and fulfillment. Does that make sense? Can you talk about that a bit?

TH: Yeah. I certainly agree with people like John Zerzan who talk about the symbolic life being the essence of civilization. I think those are really good points, that once you begin to engage in symbolic thought there are problems that can arise. It can separate you from the real world or the natural world or immediate experience or whatever you want to call that, but just as someone who has been very interested in evolutionary biology for a long time...we have evolved the part of the brain that does symbolic thought, and it's the center of our ability to create meaning. So, it's there. I don't think we can get rid of it. And I consider it an adaptation. The part of the neocortex that does symbolic thought arose...and one of the things it does is integrate sensory data: we have all this sensory data and the advanced neocortex does stuff with it so we can plan, and we can foresee things that are not existent, we can do things that maybe some other animals can't do. And that allows us to move into new places, to generate novelty, and evolution is really big on novelty. So, I have a hard time saying symbolic thought is bad, and evolution has come up with a dumb idea. Maybe it has. It might turn out to be a blind alley, like antlers that are too big to function, or something like that. But I guess part of my point is that symbolic thought doesn't eliminate our connection with the natural world. It can, I think, add to it. And we still have all those senses, the ability to connect directly is still there. We have this additional layer that is on top of it. And I think that the senses can be just as distracting. You know, we all know people who are addicted to sex, or food, or drugs, or some [other] immediate experience, and it can be to the extent where they don't want to experience anything else. So, any kind of input, I think, can be badly used, can be a destructive force for disconnecting people [from the world]. I think our challenge is to be wise and to understand that symbolic thought can be dangerous, and it can also be used to manipulate us as well. We can be distracted not just by bread, but also by circuses. So, we need to be aware of symbolic thought's potential and its real possibility to be abused. But we can't get rid of it. It's there. It's a part of the brain [...] it's going to do that, it's going to turn out symbolic thought. So, we need to learn how to work with it in a way that doesn't rob us of immediacy but somehow adds to it. So, that's just my thinking as a biologist, to say, we've got this part of the brain, and rather than trying to dispose of it or ignore it or, something like...destroy it...we're stuck with it so, how do we make the best use of it? But I definitely agree that it can put a layer between us and the community of experience and we need to be careful about that.

BF: To follow up on that, how then do you look at the very large span of human history...you could say more than ninety percent of it was...of our time, of being essentially genetically the same, was without a rich symbolic culture, was without...at least, insofar as we can tell from the fossil record, without paintings and probably pre-lingual. Do you still imagine there being a rich symbolic inner life for those humans even if they weren't producing artifacts that represented it?

TH: I think as soon...we started using tools, about 2,000,000 years ago, we started manipulating fire about 800,000 years ago and symbolic thought is way more recent than that. So, I think that we did have an inner life, but there was actually a physical portion of the brain that appeared about... somewhere between about 70,000 to 30,000 years

ago. So, there was an actual physical change around then. Our genetics are the same, basically...something occurred at this point, so that to me is kind of a big mystery. Why did that happen and what changed in us, why has this ability for symbolic thought come along? I guess one way that I look at it is that we have made mistakes, we have been misled by symbolic thought and fooled by language and, you know, disconnected from the world. So, this is part of why I advocate an exploration of a horticultural society rather than an agricultural one. Because it looks to me like we seriously lost our way about 10,000 years ago. We went down this blind alley of agriculture that turns out not to be viable ecologically, and it turns out to be a terrible waste of human ability as well. 99% of people are slaves, essentially. So, when you get lost you go back to the last place you knew where you were on track, and about 10,000 years ago humanity wasn't doing so badly, so, let's look at that fork in the road and see what other directions we can think about going. And if that fork turns out to be wrong then maybe you have to go further back. So, I think that just being aware again, of the potentiality of symbolic thought to disconnect us from the world – that's a very important piece. So, I'm grateful to the various philosophers, people like Zerzan, who have pointed that out to us.

BF: I guess that leaves me wondering whether that new feature of the brain that you're describing had to do with neuroplasticity and maybe was something that was always coded for as a potential development, but then there was some kind of cultural shift that encouraged that plasticity to manifest itself in a particular way. And maybe, in a sense, we've overdeveloped it, become overly focused on the symbolic, and then addicted to it – and then you have all the attendant problems of civilization coming out of that.

TH: That's certainly a possibility. Evolutionary biologists talk about having an exaptation, that something evolved that wasn't necessarily designed to do that, but we started using it to do that and it wound up taking us, perhaps, down a very destructive path – or it's a tool that we haven't learned how to use yet. It's a very interesting possibility.

BF: I'm going to quote you from *Gaia's Garden*. You described yourself imagining "the southwest," as in the southwest of the United States, "covered in a rich food forest such as this one. Each house could be a nucleus for an expanding net of green canopy and deep soil, eventually linking in to a continuous carpet of lush abundant nature." To me, that's a really beautiful vision, and it seems to be your idea of a more mature horticultural society. So, in this world where you have what it seems like you're describing – more or less, homesteads that are linked in community – is there room in this vision for cities as we know them, real urban life? And the fact that, you know, urban life means, first, massive amounts of concrete and other impermeable cover and population densities such that the city basically has to feed off the surrounding countryside... It's difficult for me to see how the cities could really fit in to that, and, if that's the case, what does it really mean to be doing urban permaculture?

TH: That's a really good question. I think that these large cities, cities of more than a half a million or so, are really just artifacts of the fossil fuel age. I think it's really difficult...you know, ancient Rome at its peak was maybe a million people, and there haven't been many cities of that size. So, I think those large cities – unless we

discover some magical new energy source, and I kind of hope we don't – really, megacities are going to disappear. So, I'm hoping that problem will take care of itself. But I also see cities as a product of agriculture. You can't sustain large populations without a storable surplus that agriculture gives you, and without a sort of slave state. What I would think of is more kind of village-states and town-states that are interconnected, you know, little autonomous entities like that. I think that once you get into the city size, meaning, you know 100,000 or 500,000...pretty good size...that those do become...for one thing, people in them become disconnected from nature because there can't be enough wild nature in the city, so that creates serious pathologies. And those cities do become parasites on a larger area of the countryside around them. So, I would rather not see large cities, but I think, "Okay, right now we have them, so let's try to make them less destructive as we go down the path of what to do next." That's why I am very interested in urban permaculture. It can at least shrink some of urban areas' footprints, and then large cities themselves, I think, are just not going to be able to exist as sources of energy become too expensive to run them.

BF: So, you don't see it as reinforcing the delusion that cities are okay and are a viable way of life to participate in? Because that was actually, for Rydra and I, a big contradiction that we eventually had to come to grips with. We came to live in a city and tried to do organizing and that sort of stuff, to make cities more livable, with tenants' rights work and that kind of thing – and then eventually we decided "Well, wait, why are we doing this? We don't even really believe that these cities should exist, so what does it mean to try to make people more comfortable in them?"

TH: I think there is a lot to that. Part of it is just immediacy. I think there is a lot of misery in cities and a lot of people who need some kind of help. And we could just say, "Well, the more miserable people are, the quicker cities will come down", but, again, I have some trouble with that. But I also tend to work in much smaller [towns]... you know, I live in a town with 7,000 people, I teach mostly in smaller towns of 50,000 and that sort of thing... I used to live in large urban areas, and I too have just...they're just not for me anymore. I want to try to make cities more tolerable for people, but my own personal work is more in rural areas and villages and in modest sized towns. There's more of a future in towns of 50,000 than there are in cities of 500,000.

Looking back four years later on this conversation, there is much in this interview that rings true to me today. At the time of this interview, I was more open to the possibility of an insurrectionary anarchist praxis, but now, rereading this conversation, I find Hemenway's critique of such a praxis on the basis of the relative preference of the parasitic classes for violent confrontation almost mirroring my own assessment, including his unwillingness to totally dismiss its viability. The same goes for the discussion of symbolic thought, which gave me the impetus to change my own perspective on the issue.

Our main point of disagreement is Toby's allegiance to Humanist ethics. He twice mentions a need for *meeting people where they're at* along with noting his efforts to make small shifts in the right direction culturally. He makes it clear that, like me, he is a pessimist about the prospects of a

mass movement or other widespread cultural change away from our biocidal way of life; but, unlike me, he feels ethically bound to pursue social activism all the same, as though widespread change might still be possible.

Each of us must choose what they consider virtuous according to their own intuitions, analyses, and relationship with the world, but I find Hemenway's views on this front a bit unrelatable. At the very same conference where I met Toby, during one of the panels that led to a discussion of ecological catastrophe, someone in the audience raised his hand to speak and said, quietly but firmly, "I think we all need to acknowledge that the time for 'meeting people where they're at' is over." I could not agree more. It may have been possible a few centuries ago, when the Industrial Revolution was just gaining steam, the division of labor and corresponding deskilling was still relatively low, and the human population was less than one-seventh its current size, to have popularized a change in consciousness, even among the reigning elite, that would mean we would be in a profoundly different ecological scenario today. It may even have been reasonable to hold out hope as late as David Holmgren did in his *Future Scenarios* of 2009, where one of his possibilities was a shift to green technology followed by a gentle, deliberate detechnologization toward a sane, low-impact society – he has since said he no longer believes this likely, echoing other ecological pessimists like James Lovelock, Pentti Linkola, or the anonymous anarchist author of the pamphlet *Desert*.[2]

It will never be popular to both assert that our way of life is horrendous and must be abandoned and to suggest that it is most likely not possible to reform or revolutionize it on a mass scale into something livable, that we must instead move toward a praxis based on counting on only the sane, ethical, and very small minority we have among us. The disingenuous niceties of neoliberalism are that every human being is valuable, rational, and has worthy and considerable ideas; that everyone is to be granted equal human rights and entitled to consume as much as they can wrestle from the economy; and furthermore that market innovation and technological advance will eventually solve all problems as they emerge. Most political activists of any stripe, in spite of their criticism of neoliberalism, have absorbed some form of this human rights ideology, progressive optimism, and egalitarianism – in a word, Humanism – to the point that a praxis that does not somehow claim to value and account for all human beings, no matter how improbably, is intolerable.

In most circles, it is anathema to venture anti-Humanist claims and observations: that the majority of human beings in civilizations have, for the most part, submitted to authoritarian demands whether in their reactionary or revolutionary guises, and so cannot be relied upon for a sensible change of consciousness; or that the human is an animal among animals, and that it, like many creatures, is capable of monstrously overbreeding

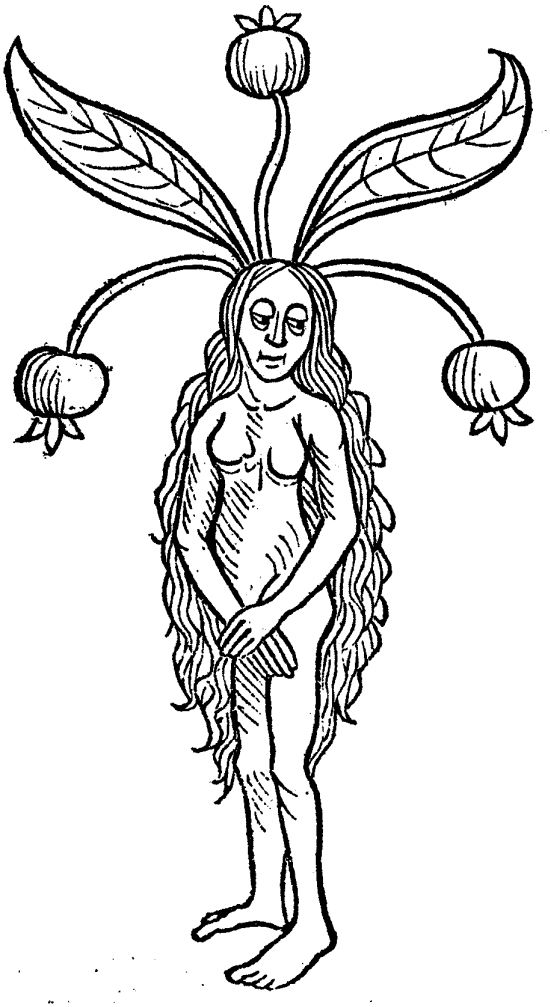
and therefore of inevitably experiencing a corresponding mass die-off. Voicing such ideas is likely to immediately result in being labeled a misanthrope, a retrograde Malthusian, or a nihilist. For such accusers, it is tacitly acceptable that the whole outer world of the biosphere be thrown on the pyre and for the whole inner world of consciousness to be increasingly flattened and stupefied while we sacrifice our own lives in continuing to exhort the ceaselessly expanding human herd, evermore distracted and consumerist, to suddenly act contrarily to the way it has always behaved.

It is therefore Hemenway's idea of "pockets of happiness" with which I most find affinity, and where I locate the project of *Backwoods*. We aim to act from where we are and with whom we already have projectual affinity – we aim to meet people where *we* are. We endeavor to find habitats with which we can symbiose and encourage others to do the same by communicating our values and sharing skills. We believe that the best we can do, and all that we need to do, is take back our lives with those who will join us, live as virtuously and joyfully as we can in this gray world, and say unflinchingly what we believe is true to whomever will listen. In doing so, we both live as best we can and uncompromisingly radiate that course to others who will hear us. The only way to end civilization is through such an individuated taking back of lives; conversely, if civilization cannot be unmade in one's lifetime, the only sensible thing to do is such individual and small group dropping out to create "pockets of happiness."

We at *Backwoods* are tremendously thankful for Hemenway's influences on permaculture and anarchism, and I consider myself very fortunate to have had a chance to speak with him at length.

**Notes**

1. His last book, however, was on urban permaculture – Hemenway had some ambivalence about urban life, as comes out in the interview.
2. Anonymous. *Desert*. St. Kilda: Stac an Armin Press, 2011. This short book is also available at theanarchistlibrary.org



# A Forest Garden Primer

*Sylvia Wilde*

Forest gardens are collections of diverse and useful plant species that are modeled on the structure of a young forest. As a horticultural pattern, forest gardening is found throughout the world, particularly around the tropical rainforest belt.[1] Temperate climate forest gardening is still practiced in parts of China, and there is much to suggest that the forest garden pattern may once have been found throughout the world's temperate forests, prior to the arrival of agriculture.[2] Practiced in diverse environments, by widely different cultures, the forest garden pattern can vary greatly in detail. The common characteristics by which the general pattern can be recognized are:

- Vertical stacking of different species (forest architecture mimicry)
- High plant diversity (200 – 400 species per garden is common)
- Typically established on small parcels of land (1/4 – 3 acres) [3]
- The use of mostly perennial plant species
- Producing a diversity of yields to meet a wide range of human needs (geared more toward subsistence than an exchange economy)
- Low energy inputs, especially as concerns ongoing maintenance
- Forest gardens are largely self-fertile and self-maintaining (ecosystem mimicry)

Unlike most horticulture and almost all agriculture, which is, by contrast, very two-dimensional, forest gardens are collections of plants arranged both vertically and horizontally. The vertical partitions of space are referred to as "layers," and the utilization of these layers by the gardener is modeled on the vertical structure of young forests, or forest edges. While tropical gardens sometimes feature up to nine distinct layers, most forest gardens comprise seven layers:

- the canopy, consisting of the largest trees in the garden
- a sub-canopy of smaller trees and large shrubs
- smaller shrubs
- herbaceous plants
- horizontally spreading plants covering the soil surface
- vining plants climbing through all of this
- and the "rhizosphere," the soil layer, from which roots and mushrooms may be harvested and upon which all the other layers depend.

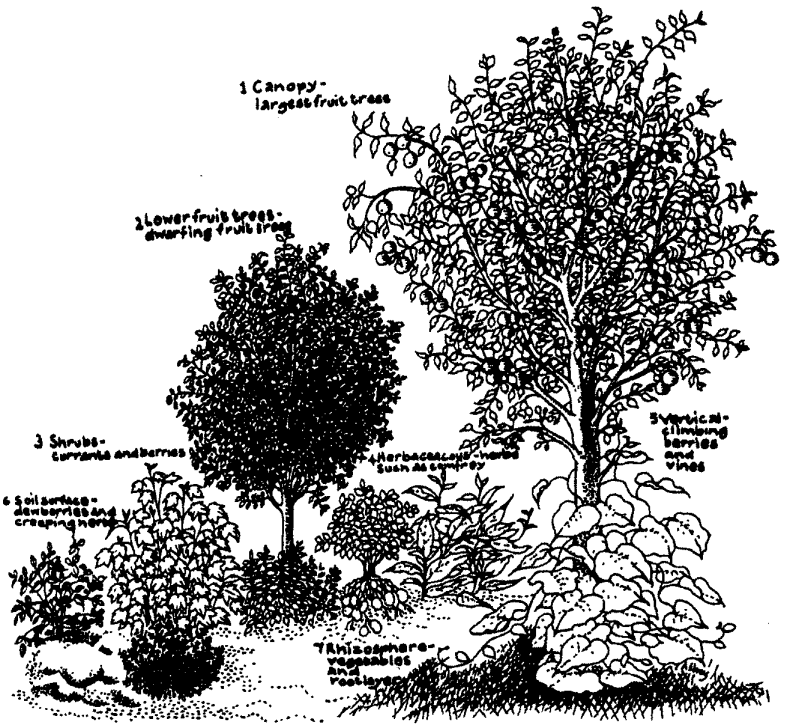
Here in the northeast, a forest garden canopy might comprise walnut, chestnut, hickory, or sugar maple; with a sub-canopy of persimmon, plum, pawpaw, saskatoon, or hazelnut; making their way into the sub-canopy are the vines: grapes, hops, hardy kiwi, groundnut; underneath these in the shrub layer, raspberries, currants, and blueberries; then nutritious and medicinal herbaceous plants and perennial vegetables such as jerusalem artichoke, nettle, milkweed, lovage, or echinacea; and finally, protecting the soil surface, a carpet of strawberries, lingonberries, oregano or mint.

The utilization of vertical space within the forest garden allows for a large number of plant species to be grown in relatively small areas. The number of species found in traditional tropical forest gardens can be truly astonishing: 200 or more plant species, of direct and indirect use to humans – not to mention, birds, insects, and small

mammals – is typical on a ¼ acre of forest garden. But even in temperate climates, the species diversity can be very impressive, and 200 – 300 species over an acre or two is not uncommon. The diversity of species in forest gardens makes them very resilient to pest and disease infestations, as these usually only effect a small number of related species at any given time – if a few things fail, there are many more to make up the loss.

In contrast to annual-centric horticulture and agriculture where, every year, seeds are planted and after some months, food can be harvested, the forest garden, with its large diversity of perennial species, makes harvest throughout the year – or, here in the north, throughout the spring, summer, and fall – possible (though even here we begin harvesting tree sap in late winter). The gardener intentionally selects species to provide harvests for as many months of the year as is ecologically possible, and thus, avoids the need to grow any one species in large enough quantities that it may be stored as a primary staple food for the entire year.[4] Harvesting from many species at different times of the year makes the forest gardener's way a particularly robust and resilient way of growing food.

Forest gardens provide much more than just food, though. As already mentioned, a characteristic of forest gardens around the world is that they are geared more toward subsistence than an exchange economy. That is not to say that cash crops are never grown in forest gardens, but the gardens are typically planted with such a range of species as to allow the gardener to meet most, if




*After Hart, 1996.*

Wild forest | Forest garden | Orchard | Pasture | Annual cultivation

*After Crawford, 2010.*

not all, of her needs from her forest garden. There are plants for food, yes, but also plants for medicine, for fuel, for fiber, for dye, for building, woodworking and basketry materials, and also plants whose place may be primarily in providing ecosystem functions, such as nitrogen fixation, or attracting certain types of insects, necessary to the overall health of the garden.

Tropical forest gardens tend to be planted on small plots of land, often only ¼ to ½ acre in size. In the tropics, as there is a year-round growing season, with more intense sunlight, and many more shade adapted plants, forest gardeners are able to plant very large numbers of species in small areas. While in the tropics, a ¼ acre of forest garden may be sufficient for a household,[5] in temperate regions with less sun and fewer plants that remain productive in shade, more space is required to allow for wider tree spacing, which, in turn, allows more light to reach the understory, keeping the plants there productive. Temperate climate forest gardens, geared towards the needs of a single household, tend more towards 1 to 2 acres in size.

In forest bioregions, the land, if left alone following disturbance, will quickly move through successive stages of development until it is again clothed in forest: the forces of nature are always tending toward a forest ecosystem. If working in opposition to this natural tendency, hefty energy inputs are required to maintain the land in a non-forested state, and the further from forest one goes, the higher the requirements become. Thus, agriculture – keeping a field where there would otherwise be forest, dependent almost exclusively on annual plant species where there would otherwise be perennial species – is the most energy-intensive way of meeting our needs: it requires the most labor (or the most fossil fuels).

The forest garden works with the natural tendency of the land. In some forms of forest gardening, the garden literally hitches a ride, as the site is cleared, planted, and then let revert to forest at its natural rate, a new garden site being opened elsewhere as the forest canopy closes.[6] In many forms of forest gardening, reversion to mature forest is arrested prior to full canopy closure, largely through the selective harvesting of trees to re-open the canopy.

In the forest garden, the major energy input comes in the establishment of the garden – the clearing and preparation of the garden site and the planting of the garden. As the planting is of mostly perennial plants, the planting only needs to be done once, not every year (though plantings are typically added to or changed, and replacements of varieties are made – after all, it is gardening, and gardeners are potterers). Clearing and preparing of the site, in sedentary models of forest gardening, can also be done but once. In shifting models, typically found in large tropical forests, the clearing and site preparation may be done as often as every five years. Following establishment, the

main activity of the forest gardener (or forage gardener) is harvesting.

As the forest garden closely approximates a stage of natural forest succession, it can, like the young forest it mimics, be self-fertile and thus largely self-maintaining. The normal processes that fertilize the forest, such as the decomposition of woody organic matter and leaf litter by fungi, insects, and soil organisms, are also present in the forest garden. And significant quantities of bird, insect, and animal manure are to be found, as they are in young forests. The use of many leguminous nitrogen- fixing species by forest gardeners – to improve soil conditions for the surrounding plants – is a mimicry of the ecosystem function of pioneer species. Pioneer plants, present in the early and mid stages of forest succession, enrich the soil and nurse the young trees that will later become the canopy of the mature forest, protecting them from wind and animal browse.

Like a forest, yet unlike agriculture, the underground space of the forest garden is partitioned as well. In monocultures, the plant roots are all down at roughly the same depth in the soil and looking for exactly the same minerals and nutrients as their neighbors. In the highly diverse perennial polycultures of forest gardens, different soil depths are occupied and the precise needs of the plants (being different species) differ, thus plants may be grown in close proximity to each other without resulting in soil depletion and excessive competition between plants.

It took the monocultural minds of Westerners a good while to recognize that the chaotic mess of vegetation surrounding homes and village sites in such diverse places as Sri Lanka, Tanzania, or southern Mexico was, in fact, an ecologically-sophisticated way of meeting most of the essential needs of the gardeners. Yet agroforestry, the agricultural approach to three-dimensional perennial polycultures that came into being in the early to mid-twentieth century – large scale, machine-harvestable, market-oriented – when it recognizes forest gardening at all, sees it only as a distant and difficult relative.

The revival of forest gardening in the west is due largely to the experiments of Robert Hart, a Tolstoyan anarchist, author, and small-hold farmer. In the 1970's, Hart developed an interest in agroforestry – in particular, the system of "three-dimensional farming" developed in the 1950's by Toyohiko Kagawa – and began his own experiments with (what was to later be called) forest gardening, on 1/8th of an acre of old orchard. On this tiny piece of land, Hart developed a productive garden (yielding food and basketry materials mainly), far more ecologically complex than any form of agroforestry then being practiced, and far closer to the chaotic tropical forest gardens that agroforestry sought to simplify. This is hardly surprising, as agroforestry is focused on production for a market-economy, whereas Hart sought a decentralized and de-industrialized society where households and villages would be largely self-sufficient. The great irony here is that Hart was conducting his experiments in the Welsh border lands of Shropshire, England, the precise place where the industrial revolution began. Hart's vision of the forest garden was one of raising the self-sufficiency of households to facilitate economic down-sizing and a return to highly localized economic activity, of creating sites of practical education for children in the life skills of feeding and sheltering themselves through co-operation with diverse species in living systems, and of a means of re-greening the forest environments that agriculture and urbanism had denuded.

Robert Hart's work has inspired a subsequent generation of neo-forest gardeners, particularly in the United Kingdom, continental Europe, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. While Hart's forest gardening idea is often thought to be synonymous with permaculture, it was pioneered independently of permaculture,[7] and if the practice has been widely adopted by permaculturalists, it is because, in many ways, it could be considered the

quintessential permaculture technique of production: an ecologically regenerative/benign, low-labor, solar-powered, self-maintaining, resilient production system that is directed toward household and community self-sufficiency. While there may be some problems with the way forest gardening has been incorporated into permaculture practice, such as a focus almost solely on the production of food, rather than the full range of things needed for a subsistence life, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that many of the techniques used in temperate climate forest gardening by neo-forest gardeners, particularly those of design and site preparation prior to the establishment of a garden, are the fruit of decades of research, experimentation, teaching, and networking by permaculture practitioners.

Hart's pioneering work has inspired not only some spectacular gardens but also some very good texts on forest garden theory and practice. The most notable of these are Martin Crawford's *Creating a Forest Garden*, and the two-volume set, *Edible Forest Gardens*, by Dave Jacke and Eric Toensmeier. The former is, in my opinion, the better introductory text as it clearly lays out the basics of temperate climate forest garden theory, design, and implementation, and it is authored by the person who has created what is, by popular consensus amongst forest gardeners, the finest example of a temperate climate forest garden in the western hemisphere. But once hooked and eager to take up the art of forest gardening, the Jacke and Toensmeier texts become indispensable, particularly if you live in the northeastern United States, the region where these two forest gardeners reside and upon which the volumes are focused. These are encyclopedic tomes: the first volume is a thorough exploration of forest ecosystem theory, while the second contains detailed explanations of site assessment and design processes, forest garden implementation and maintenance, and includes a near-exhaustive list of useful perennial plants for temperate climates. There is so much information in these two volumes that I fear, for the uninitiated, they may make forest gardening appear ridiculously complicated, which it is not. Forest gardens, as close mimics of natural forests, are complicated beyond our understanding, and therefore, the gardener need not attempt to understand everything as the scientist seeks to, but rather, through observation and participation in the evolution of this ecosystem in miniature, can develop and depend upon the craft and intuition usually associated with the artist, or master gardener. There are a few fundamental ideas and techniques that need to be thoroughly grasped before planting a forest garden, but only a few. On the other hand, to become a master forest gardener will likely take a lifetime.

Finally, there is also Robert Hart's *Forest Gardening*, not a how-to manual so much as a poetic exploration of Hart's vision of the forest garden and how he came to it. As the focus of neo-forest gardeners has largely been on technique, it is good to remind ourselves that, at least as Hart saw it, the real fruits of the forest garden were self-sufficiency and autonomy.

**Notes**

1. Forest gardening is still practiced in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Tanzania, Nigeria, central America, and the Amazon. (Hart; Crawford; Lawton; Workman)
2. This claim, based upon a slightly broader definition of forest gardening than I have given in this article, includes practices that might better be called, as Dave Jacke has, "gardening the forest," or, as M. Kat Anderson has called them, "tending the wild." Examples of this more extensive approach to "forest gardening," include the Jōmon, indigenous to the Japanese archipelago (Workman 2013), indigenous peoples of the eastern forest bioregion of North America (Jacke 2005a: 14), and the indigenous peoples of California (Anderson). In Europe, traditional coppice practices and the cultivation of hedgerows comprising many useful forest-edge species are certainly forms of "agroforestry," but may also suggest older practices of tending the wild.
3. Forest gardens are "over-yielding" systems, meaning that multiple harvests of different crops are possible from the same piece of land. The implication of this is that, while forest gardens cannot produce yields of a single crop comparable to agriculture, they can produce overall yields, from a given piece of land, far higher than that achieved with agricultural techniques. Thus, when geared toward subsistence, forest gardens need only take up relatively small areas of land.
4. While in the tropics it may not be necessary to store food for any length of time, in temperate climates, particularly the further north or south you go, it is. Thus, temperate climate forest gardeners do generally grow crops suitable for long term storage – nuts, in particular, but also fruits, seeds and tubers – however, they can do this by spreading the quantities needed, or desired, across as large a number of species as possible. This approach creates resiliency against crop failure in the forest garden.
5. It should be noted that tropical forest gardeners often also have access to much larger forest areas and so it should not be thought that everything is coming from the forest garden. Many wild foods, medicines, materials, and particularly firewood will often be gathered from outside the forest garden.
6. This practice, often derogatorily referred to as slash-and-burn agriculture, when viewed in the light of what ecologists have called the patch dynamic theory of forest succession (Jacke 2005: 268) – in part, the idea that a forest, rather than taking a single, linear path towards a static, climax state, is rather continuously cycling through all stages of succession across different parts of the forest – may in fact be a very sensitive mimicry of natural forest disturbance patterns. Naturally, such disturbances might occur when a large tree falls in the forest, taking a good number of surrounding trees with it, some uprooting and disturbing the soil, leaving a clearing where primary and secondary stages of forest growth will now manifest. Other natural occurrences such as wind storms and wild fires can also create such patches. The size of patch that can be created by a large tree falling in a forest is not dissimilar to the size of many shifting forest gardens.
7. As practitioners view permaculture as a "toolbox" of techniques, as well as a design system, they have the tendency to label anything that resembles it, or is useful to it, as "permaculture." While this infuriates some horticultural innovators who do not want to be thought of as permaculturalists, Robert Hart seems to have been only too happy to be included in the permaculture fold.

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# The Garden Path

*Kanzan Kitsune*

Sudajii (*Castanopsis cuspidata* var. *sieboldii*): Ample moss-covered trunk rooted firmly on the ridge line rises to a vast canopy, drinking plentifully of sunlight to provide the community below cool moist shade. Sudajii, or shii, the elder, teaches the forest how to grow (and long ago taught humans how to grow shiitake mushrooms). Come Fall, this generous canopy showers the land with nuts. Perpetual forest. Perpetual food, fuel, medicine, and materials.

In Sudajii's shade grows cha, té, tea (*Camellia sinensis*). That severe old wall-gazer Bodhidharma cuts off his eyelids and where they fall to the ground tea grows. A leaf falls in Shen Nong's bowl of boiling water....

Crossing the tea house floor in measured steps, every action performed with practiced serenity. A ritual that comes close to tea's spirit medicine. Tea monocultures covering entire mountain sides do not.

Tall, perfectly straight, evenly spaced: An economic uniformity utterly alien to the wild. A sugi (*Cryptomeria japonica*) plantation bereft of a true forest's anarchic vigor, free association, and multi-generational growing, teaching, feeding. A lifespan determined by "board feet", machine size, global markets...left standing for as long as it remains cheaper to fell tropical rainforests. Hopelessly incapable of performing the necessary ecosystem functions across the vast tracts it covers, it sways sadly, listening for chainsaw or strong wind. Sensing the movement of vines making their way from the regenerating forest below.

From the slopes bearing down on the stream, a panoply of trees, shrubs, vines, birds, fire-flies, monkeys... Ferns at the water's edge, loquat and wild fig above. Kudzu, akebi, wisteria – vines clambering all over and through the mountain chestnuts, and higher. Gripping the sugi at the plantation's edge, they mercifully topple these misplaced shallow rooted anomalies. Healing is what plants do. A "chaos" that protects the forest interior, re-wilds domesticated lands and provides the animals (like us) with food and medicine.

A little more space, a little more light. Forest and human habitation meet. Stream side: Berries and herbs and thickets of itadori pin down the forest's protective mantle.

A pattern repeats. Fruit and nut bearing trees entwined with vines. A sub-canopy of cha, fig, mulberry.... Lower still, shrubs, brambles, and herbs.

Itadori (Japanese knotweed, *Polygonum cuspidatum* syn. *Fallopia japonica, Reynoutria japonica*): Itadori's succulent shoots are a spring staple. The hollow tube-like stems snapped and gathered when about thirty centimetres tall.

Called "invasive," a sort of war is waged against it in North America – where Lyme disease has reached near-epidemic proportions. Japanese knotweed is one of the premier herbs for the treatment of Lyme disease.

*Antibacterial, antiviral, antispirochetal, antifungal, immunostimulant, immunomodulant, antiinflammatory, antioxidant, antimutagenic, central nervous system relaxant, central nervous system protectant, anticarcinogenic, angiogenesis modulator, vasodialator, antiasthmatic, cardioprotective, antiathersclerotic, antihyperlidemic, antineoplastic, hepatoprotective, inhibits platelet aggregation, antithrombotic, antipyretic, analgesic, antiulcer, hemostatic, and astringent.*

As it rids the body of deep infections and toxins, so it rids the earth of heavy metal contamination and cleans polluted streams. The Japanese name *itadori* means removes pain.

Cold, cold water from the heart of the mountain: Slick, mossy surfaces. Dragonfly waits on a blade of rush. Spider waits too, web catching the glance of Sun. Dragonfly darts up to a fern frond perched high over the stream. Another sits mid-stream on a sun warmed stone – orange wings, sleek silver body terminating in two large black orbs. All of a sudden, both dragonflies launch above the stream, tumble through the air, chase one another to the far bank. Spider continues to wait. Water flows. Dragonfly returns to the same blade of rush as before.

Kiwi climbs persimmon, making for the Sun. Below, cool water bubbles up from the earth – a gently carved course lined with aromatic peppermint, water celery and watercress, fuki and reeds.

With back turned to a young stand of koriyanagi willow – some of these slim pliable canes soon to become baskets – north across the far edge of a small clearing two chestnut canopies meet. From trunk to drip-line, from deep to dappled shade,

myoga ginger spreads. In the v-shaped sunny nook, formed where the chestnuts' long lower branches stretch and touch, is yuzu, a citrus. In front, a stand of yacon metabolizes full sun into sweet, crunchy tubers. To the west, a small thicket of jerusalem artichoke, tall slender stalks climbed by *Apios americana*, together sheltering the splayed deep green foliage of ashitaba. On the western edge of the clearing, another citrus – this with mandarin-like fruit – and persimmon. Further west, the canopy starts to climb. A large loquat, then higher to nashi pear and higher still to walnut. Rising with the canopy the twining akebi (chocolate vine) and carpeting the ground below, the winter raspberry, fuyuichigo.

No weeds, no crops. No invasives, exotics, natives. No pests or beneficial insects. A post- (and pre) agricultural landscape.

Entering the forest to collect the fallen branches with which we cook our meals, I go a little farther to visit a friend. The forest is unusually still. In the western sky, the sun blazes but here, filtered by foliage, the light is soft and the air cool. A leaf falls, tracing a near perfect vertical line to the ground.

*Shizuoka, Japan*

# On Subsistence & Slavery

*Fera Sylvain*

*The institution of Slavery is the principal cause of civilization. Perhaps nothing can be more evident than that it is the sole cause... Without it, there can be no accumulation of property, no providence for the future, no taste for comforts and elegancies, which are the characteristics and essentials of civilization.... Servitude is the condition of civilization.*
- Senator William Harper, 1837

*It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself.*
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

These words of Thoreau's, while undoubtedly controversial when first published, are perhaps even more so today. For in Thoreau's time, when chattel slavery was still being practiced in the South, comparisons between chattel slaves and wage slaves were not uncommon. (Davis 2015: 306-315) What is unsettling for many, then as now, is that Thoreau is suggesting that "progress" may perhaps be better understood as a recalibration and deepening of the systems of domination under which we are forced to toil. Rather than leading to a freer way of life, it leads instead to a more complete form of enslavement where the very notion of freedom is rendered meaningless.

Those outraged by Thoreau's words will argue vehemently that there can be no comparison between the brutal system of institutionalized chattel slavery and the condition of the wage earner in a capitalist market-economy. It should be remembered, however, that although we look back on chattel slavery in North America as a monolithic form of tyrannical brutality, it was, in fact, like all systems of control, not static, but subject to changes, adjustments, and fine tuning, that is, more or less brutal depending on changing circumstances. At the time Thoreau was writing, the resemblances between chattel slaves and wage slaves were not so difficult to discern because many Southern plantation owners had already adopted the capitalist technique of encouraging work through a system of rewards and punishments as more effective than the older system of pure punishment. (Davis 1975: 317) Further, in Thoreau's time waged workers could still be subjected to physical punishment for infractions against their employer's will. Although the treatment of waged workers in the North and chattel slaves in the South may not have always been as dissimilar as we might believe today, the point being made by Thoreau actually has little to do with the physical conditions or treatment of these two groups of slaves but is rather a comparison of their psychic condition: at least the Southern chattel slave desired an end to her enslavement! If the worst is to be slave-driver of yourself, it is because your condition of slavery has

become normalized to the point where not only is there no desire to end your enslavement, you will likely fight to defend it.

While the anti-slavery Thoreau seems to have been in agreement with William Harper, the pro-slavery senator from South Carolina, that "servitude is the condition of civilization," their conclusions were far from the same. For Harper, the conclusion was: therefore we must accept slavery in our society. Thoreau, on the other hand, concluded that if civilization implies slavery, then we best take to the woods and return to a subsistence way of life.

The vast majority of the planet's human inhabitants are indeed slaves, for their *survival* is dependent on their working to earn money in order to pay for the necessities of survival. They are *owned* by the economy, for they cannot survive outside of it. Life (time) is traded on the job market, and survival is purchased in the supermarket.

There is *apparently* no choice but to undertake some kind of waged work. Participation in the economy is guaranteed by the demand that tribute be paid to the State in the currency of the State, a demand clearly backed by force and the threat of violence. Even if one has access to land on which one could conceivably subsist, taxes or rents on that property must be paid. As with the "hut tax" introduced by British colonial officials in Africa to force self-sufficient rural communities into the money-economy, the formerly self-sufficient household or community must now dedicate part of their time to activities that produce a surplus (anything beyond what is needed for their own subsistence) to be traded in the marketplace in order to obtain State-issued currency with which they can pay tax (tribute).

In a "free society," a society without slavery, we would have a choice as to whether we undertook this extra economic activity – necessary only for the continuation of economic society – or not, instead simply producing what we need. But not living in the Land of the Free, that choice has been stolen from us. Taking away our ability to choose has long been the policy of this civilization's ruling elites, resulting in sustained and calculated attacks by the State against subsistence lifeways. The destruction of self-sufficiency is sound economic policy, as any mainstream economist will tell you, for a capitalist market-economy needs perpetual growth.

Over-production – producing more than the producer needs to subsist – is a condition *necessary* for the creation and maintenance of authoritarian societies.[1] The assertion of authority depends upon being able to compel the subjugated to follow the rulers' will, and compulsion, in one way or another, takes the form of violence: the threat of starvation, of eviction, of eternal

damnation, of torture, of imprisonment, of execution.... Without the ability to back up such threats, Power is empty. Power must be backed by violence, and violence has a price. Gangs of thugs, temple builders, bureaucrats, developers of control technologies,...must all be paid for. To pay for the creation and maintenance of the institutions that secure and deepen the reach of authority over a subjugated population, it is necessary that a surplus is being produced somewhere.[2]

In order to maintain authority then, subjugated people must be put to work in the creation of a surplus, the currency of Power. But work is an activity that most people take up grudgingly – that is, unless compelled to do otherwise, they will work as little as possible (just enough).

As Joseph Winogrand explains, our word *Work* comes directly from Old English and meant "labor" as it does today. But, it also meant "affliction, suffering, pain, trouble, distress," and in the adjective/adverb form of *worky*, "painful, bitter, difficult, hard..." (Winogrand: 106) Given these meanings, it is unlikely that the English peasant of the Middle Ages considered their own subsistence activities – tending their gardens and small flocks, foraging and hunting, spinning yarn or weaving baskets – as *work*. No, as Winogrand suggests, much more likely is that these meanings are the result of "forced military construction, of interminable road, bridge and fortress building and repair imposed on the local populace by kings, lords and their riding knights." (*Ibid.*)

Until recently, the industrious individual has been an aberration. It is only through long centuries of physical and psychological coercion that his frenetic activity has come to be seen as normal. That this aberration has come to represent the ideal in our society merely reflects the degree to which we have internalized the will of our rulers, the degree to which we've all become little Franklins, the slave-drivers of ourselves.[3]

**The Economics of Slavery**

How to keep chattel slaves working once "emancipated" was a central concern of the British abolitionists petitioning their government for an end to chattel slavery in Britain's West Indian colonies early in the 19th century. All sides of the debate – abolitionists, plantation owners, slavery apologists and parliamentarians (these latter usually belonged to one of the former camps anyway) – were in perfect accord on one point: whatever happened, the plantations were still going to need workers. And, as preeminent slavery historian David Brion Davis tells us, though their fine speeches were couched in the language of "evangelical appeals to sin, guilt, retribution, and deliverance" their particular conception of order and moral progress involved "a highly utilitarian analysis of punishment, nutrition, land use, labor incentives, productivity, and revenue." (Davis 1984: 211) For the abolitionists, as for the managers of the British Empire, granting freedom to slaves would be morally irresponsible unless the slaves showed themselves able, that is, *willing*, to climb the ladder of progress and embrace Western Civilization, to be sufficiently possessed by the spirit of capitalism.

Yet, experience had shown this not to be the case: given half a chance, the slave would immediately return to a life of "sloth" and "idleness." They took up subsistence horticulture and worked only as much as was necessary to meet their needs, which were few. (*Ibid.*: 196) Therefore, "freedom," as conceived by the abolitionists, was to be granted only within the narrowest of confines. In essence, it was the planters, the slave owners, who were to be set free: free from having to concern themselves with the expensive business of keeping slaves sufficiently subjugated while

also keeping them fed, clothed, and housed. Utilitarian thinkers of the time had already pointed out that chattel slavery was a costly, inefficient way to keep the production machine running.[4] Nevertheless, the reluctance to free slaves in the British West Indies was based on the belief that productivity, profits, and land values would plummet. (*Ibid.*: 214) The abolitionists were fearful of such an outcome for, as Davis explains, they believed that "the success of emancipation in the eyes of the world would ultimately depend on the ability of free labor to produce cheaper sugar than that produced by the slaves of Cuba, Brazil, the United States...." (*Ibid.*: 219)

The problem of abolition, then, was a problem of how to rein in the inefficiency and overt violence of chattel slavery while keeping the slaves on an evolutionary path from lazy savage to *Homo economicus*: how to coercively guarantee ongoing contributions to civilization's expansion, how to free a slave while simultaneously keeping them enslaved. The answer for the abolitionists, an answer entirely agreeable to the Statecrafters they appealed to – for after all, given its utility to the State it was *progressive* – was to transform chattel slavery into wage slavery.

The slave's predilection to slack, to doing no more than necessary, to living a subsistence life, was the main obstacle to be overcome. The plan for overcoming this barrier to progress involved "a liberal motive" taking the place of a "servile one," that is, "the dread of starving" taking the place of "the dread of being flogged."

> *If all the soil which for the present, may be regarded as superfluous, were rendered barren or inaccessible until an increasing population should require encreased supplies, the alternative of industry or starving would be presented to the whole Body of the people, and there is no*

> *doubt what would be their choice. But that which we may not hope from nature, we may do for ourselves; and a discriminating land-tax may as effectually forbid the culture of the particular Districts affected by it, as though they were annually visited by the locust. The Owners of the privileged soils would thus have a virtual monopoly of food, and of all other necessaries & comforts of life.... The manumitted Slave must therefore not only cease to indulge himself in a life of idleness, but must betake himself to that description of labour in which the land-holder of the privileged class, may be pleased to find him employment. The dread of starving is thus substituted for the dread of being flogged. A liberal motive takes the place of a servile one. The "Emancipist" undergoes a transition from the brutal to the rational predicament; and the Planter incurs no other loss than that of finding his whips, stocks and manacles deprived of their use & value.*
> - James Stephen, 1832. (*Ibid.*: 218)

*Sir* James Stephen[5] was architect of the Slavery Abolition Act that was passed by the British parliament in 1833. If his words are striking, it is not for their originality – his reasoning was not new, he was merely applying the thinking of classical political economists to the West Indian

colonial context, thinking which had already been put into action at home, as we shall see – no, what is striking is the clarity with which he expresses himself. It should be noted, however, that the above quotation is taken from a commentary on a confidential colonial office memo. Amongst themselves the ruling elites were open and frank about their plans, for the general public a different tone and message was adopted. As Viscount Howick[6] expressed it, there was no need "to state publickly the theory of the proposed method of inducing the Slaves to continue their emancipation to labour for hire." (*Ibid.*: 217)

The abolitionists public claim was that of being the representatives, as Thomas Fowell Buxton[7] put it, of the "moral and religious feelings of the people," to represent a new sensibility "that condemned public displays of cruelty, torture, coarseness, drunkenness, and physical disorder."(*Ibid.*: 212) Well-intentioned this may sound, but in the same letter Buxton goes on to say how he was "impressed by the connections between the public refinement in manners and the new prison system, asylums, workhouses, and other institutions for social control." (*Ibid.*: 351) In the name of high Christian morality, the abolitionists were sanctioning State experiments in social engineering. And indeed, as Davis tells us, "Great Britain was the first nation in which a government responded to such modern sensibilities with modern and scientific formulas for social control. The merger of altruism and utilitarianism." (*Ibid.*: 212) Naturally, this merger produced some inconsistencies. Davis points out that Stephen "stressed the almost unequaled docility of black slaves; suggested that this otherwise barbarous and tyrannical system had prepared emancipated slaves, 'in common with other free men,' to 'imbibe the sentiment of deference for an authority which though occasionally unequal in its exercise, is established for the common good of the whole Society, and is habitually exercised with no other view'; and then called for a military, naval, and constabulary force 'at once so irresistible and so palpable as to repress whatever disposition to revolt may be manifested.'" (*Ibid.*: 213)

The commonly held view amongst abolitionists, politicians, and planters was that the "freedman" would most likely retreat to the forested mountains and take up subsistence horticulture, and, as Davis summarizes the argument, having "no incentive to better his condition or to impose any but the slightest discipline on himself...might well become a more degraded being than his ancestors in Africa." (*Ibid.*: 214) Davis points out that the assumptions underlying the abolitionists plans "were essentially identical with those Stephen embodied in a circular dispatch intended for colonial governors in January 1833.... Everyone acknowledged the need for a vast educational program aimed at Christianizing and civilizing the freedmen, whose aspirations and habits of life should eventually sustain such a demand for the products of human industry 'as can be gratified only by *persevering and self-denying labor.*'" (*Ibid.*: 215. Emphasis added) A critical part of this educational program, as Stephen made so clear, was simply to make a subsistence life impossible. The freed slaves would certainly learn to be their own slave-drivers if they had no other choice. Stephen again:

> *...measures must be adopted, tending more directly to counteract the disposition to sloth which may be expected to manifest itself, so soon as the coercive force of the Owners' Authority shall have been withdrawn. The manumitted Slaves must be stimulated to Industry by positive Laws which shall enhance the difficulty of obtaining a mere subsistence.* (*Ibid.*)

In a colonial office memo, Howick argued that "there was only one way to ensure the 'combination of productive power' on which civilization and progress depended: making the use of land so expensive for freedmen that they would have no choice but to sell their labor in a competitive market." (*Ibid.*: 217) The corollary to this, once again succinctly articulated by Stephen, in response to Howick's memo, is that "the Proprietors of the Soil in every Country are the arbiters of the condition of all other Members of society.... They who hold the keys to the Granary may (so long as they can keep their hold) make what terms they please with the rest of the world." (*Ibid.*: 218)

**The Slavery of Economics**

> [*T*]*he historical movement which changes the producers into waged workers, appears on the one hand as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds.... But on the other hand these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production and all the guarantees of existence offered by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.*
> - Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*

Modern economists like to speak of the market-economy as something natural, that is, as the best way to organize the production of goods and services and therefore something that rational people will *naturally* gravitate toward. The foundational myth of modern economics has it that when a society's exchange relations reach a certain level of complexity, the expediency of a market economy will *inevitably* lead to its preference over the clumsy arrangements of barter. The problem with this tale is that there is zero anthropological evidence for the existence of barter prior to a society's coming into contact with money. (Graeber: 28–29) Despite the lack of evidence, *exchange is assumed* as the foundation on which material culture must be built and the market-economy is claimed to be the *natural* response to the ever-increasing complexity of exchange relations in a society as it develops.

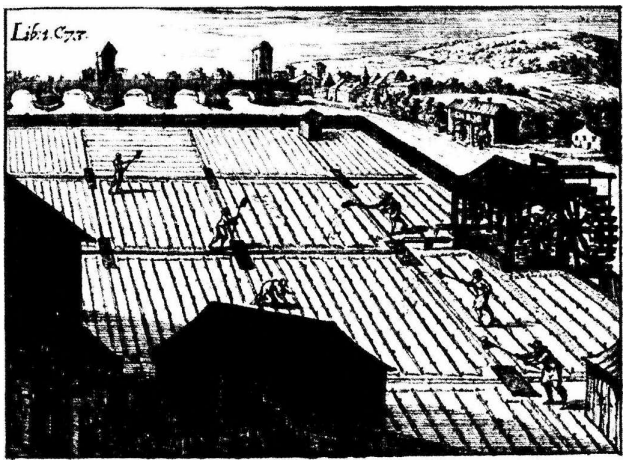
Not only do modern economists ignore the work of other disciplines, they ignore the work of their own predecessors. Classical political economists of the late 17th to the early 19th centuries were under no illusions that there was anything natural about the market. People certainly couldn't be expected to gravitate towards it. No, that their participation would require coercion was well understood.[8]

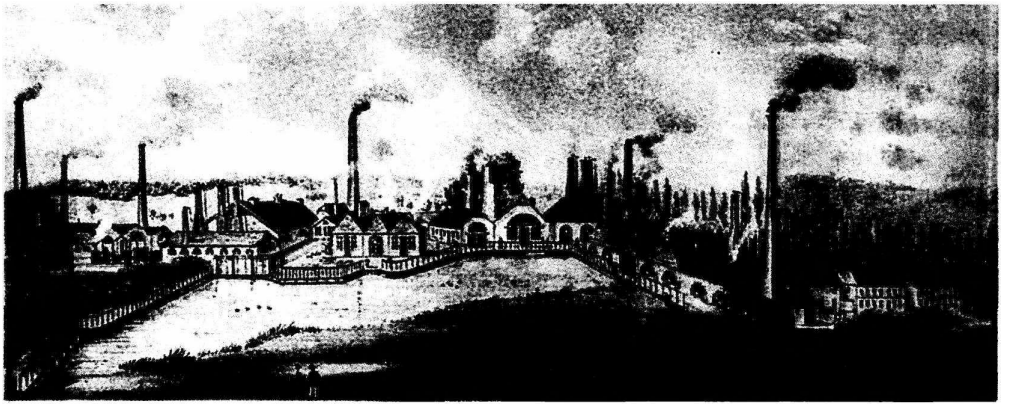
Economists and planners further understood that in order to deliver people to market, their ability to subsist outside of the market had to be undermined. Access to communal land and the solidarity and mutual aid found within self-sufficient communities were obstacles to the expansion of a market-economy and needed to be

eliminated. Thus, the problem was the same as that later to be encountered by the managers of "emancipation" in the West Indies: how to undermine subsistence lifeways in order to ensure people have no choice but to participate in the market-economy, to become wage slaves.

The creation of a working class, a class of people dependent on waged work for their survival, that is, a class who would have no choice but to enter the new factories that were springing up in the English countryside, was a condition necessary for the development of industrial capitalism. The peasants and crafts-people of feudal England, although serfs and thus already working beyond their own subsistence needs to produce a surplus for their Lords, were still, by and large, self-sufficient: rural communities produced the items necessary for the survival of community members and the reproduction of the community as a whole. Rural people had no need for the factories, only the factories needed the people. A future of industrial production and mass consumption of its products necessitated the elimination of rural self-sufficiency. So critical was this that, as with the chattel slaves in the colonies, the State was not prepared to allow the peasants a choice in the matter. The life of an English peasant under feudalism may not have been the easiest, but industrial capitalism promised that it would get a whole lot worse.

Given that for the modern reader "industrialism" is likely to conjure images of sprawling factories at the edges of urban centers, or the rust belts that have been left in the wake of more recent economic recalibration, it is good to remember that the dawn of the industrial revolution occurred in the English countryside and that it was entirely dependent on greatly increased agricultural production. A proto-industrial agriculture, and an expansion of this agriculture around the world, was necessary for supplying the new factories with raw materials and for meeting the subsistence needs of the workers, soon to be barred from the existing practice of meeting their needs with their own hands on common land to which they had access. In many of these factories workers were occupied with crafts they had previously been practicing at home, such as the weaving of textiles or the making of shoes. As the 18th century author and lexicographer Samuel Johnstone observed, while a cottager could make a pair of Scottish brogues (leather shoes) in an hour at home, the price of a pair of shoes in the market-place was one half-crown per pair. Based on Adam Smith's estimates of wages for laborers – calculated for the vicinity of Edinburgh where wages were likely higher than in the countryside – to afford a pair of shoes a laborer would need to work three full days! (Perelman: 45) In many cases, the factory was to replace existing out-sourced modes of production – where the producer, working from home, could negotiate how much they would produce and in what amount of time – with a system of centralized production, workplace discipline, deadlines, production





quotas, 12 – 14 hour work days, low wages and punishments for failure to comply. To accomplish this, it was necessary to both increase production on cultivated lands and to move people from their land-based ways of life into the factories.

The problem was clear, but the solution had to be gradual. As Michael Perelman notes, these economists were well aware that "capitalist employers were not prepared to absorb the entire subsistence sector and that self-provisioning subsidized wage labor." (Perelman: 45) By leaving part of the already-existing system (where the common people, outside of cities and towns, were largely self-sufficient) in place, the workers' standard of living would be reduced and the working day lengthened as "the time spent in self-provisioning is, in effect, an extension of the working day." (*Ibid.*). *Self-sufficiency* was to become *self-provisioning* – just self-sufficient enough to allow for more surplus value to be appropriated from their labor, but not enough to allow the worker to forgo wage labor altogether. Self-provisioning, spending their "free time" providing for themselves outside of the market meant that less time on the job was used in producing what was required for their survival and more time spent in producing a surplus value that was the sole property of the capitalist.

However, caution was necessary lest the worker become "a little gardener instead of a labourer." (Chambers: 134) To prevent this undesirable outcome a calculus of exploitation was formulated, as in this statement from an 1800 issue of *Commercial and Agricultural Magazine*:

> *...a quarter acre of garden-ground will go a great way toward rendering the peasant independent of any assistance. However, in this beneficent intention moderation must be observed, or we may chance to transform the labourer into a petty farmer; from the most beneficial to the most useless of industry. When a labourer becomes possessed of more land than he and his family can cultivate in the evenings...the farmer* [employer] *can no longer depend on him for constant work, and the hay-making and harvest...must suffer to a degree which...would sometimes prove a national inconvenience.* (Thompson: 219-220)

Sir John Sinclair,[9] first president of the British Board of Agriculture, understood the equation well. In his 'Observations on the Means of

Enabling a Cottager to Keep a Cow by the Produce of a Small Portion of Arable Land' from 1803, he laid down his three principles for small farming:

> *1. That a cottager shall raise, by his own labour, some of the most material articles of subsistence for himself and his family;*
> *2. That he shall be enabled to supply the adjoining markets with the smaller agricultural productions; and*
> *3. That both he and his family shall have it in their power to assist the neighboring farmers, at all seasons, almost equally as well as if they had no land in their occupation.* (Perelman: 48)

By giving peasants little parcels of land for their private use, Sinclair hoped they would more readily accept the confiscation of large areas of traditional common lands. Further, he thought that a properly proportioned parcel of land (i.e., not quite enough) would result in a cheap labor force becoming available to agricultural employers. By Sinclair's calculations, the rural laborer would earn a little over half their income from wages (doing full-time work) with the difference made up from selling the agricultural produce they raised in their free time. And if this deal doesn't sound bad enough, he further calculated that "one-third of their money wages was expected to return to the landed gentry in the form of rents paid for their tiny plots of land." (*Ibid.*: 48 – 49)

As the industrial revolution intensified, periodic recalibration of the formula was required. As mentioned above, early capitalist technology was essentially no different from that used in traditional agricultural methods of production and thus, in order to increase the surplus value that could be extracted from the laborers' toil, the necessity of the two-pronged approach to pushing down wages: surreptitiously extending the working day while lowering the standard of living. With new production technologies ushering in new industrial methods of production, the little free time left to the rural worker – that time in which they were expected to self-provision themselves and their families – was now required by the capitalists. An example of this, provided by Perelman, is that of the textile industry: "spinning,...traditionally an agricultural sideline, could not keep pace with the increase from the mechanized capacity to weave cloth. Accordingly, the textile industry needed to move more people from part-time farming into full-time spinning." (*Ibid.*: 49)

The set of strategies that enabled British capitalists and Statecrafters to deliver people to market – by attacking the self-sufficiency of rural communities – were the infamous Enclosures. Most simply, "enclosure" meant "surrounding a piece of land with hedges, ditches, or other barriers to the free passage of men and animals, the hedge being the mark of exclusive ownership and land occupation. Through enclosure, collective land use, usually accompanied by some degree of communal land ownership, would be abolished, superseded by individual ownership and separate occupation." (Slater: 1-2) The principle *legal* ways in which land could be enclosed included "the purchase by one person of all tenements and their appurtenant common rights; the issuing by the King of a special license to enclose, or the passage of an enclosure act by Parliament; an agreement between landlord and tenants, embodied in a Chancery decree; the making of partial enclosures of waste by the lords..." (Federici: 2004) In this set of legal practices, we clearly see the origins of what today we would call *eminent domain* and *privatization*. The enclosing continues. Then, as now, these "legal methods...frequently concealed the use of force, fraud, and intimidation against the tenants." (Manning: 25)

Although the massive privatization of land associated with enclosure began in the 15th century,[10] it was between 1770 – 1830, the period to which the industrial revolution is usually ascribed, that the enclosing of land intensified. During these years, the English parliament passed some 3280 bills which resulted in the enclosure of six million acres of commonly held lands. It is estimated that private arrangements – those not directly sanctioned by the State – enclosed the same amount again. In total then, more than half the acreage of all the land then in cultivation in England was enclosed during this period. By 1830, England had not a single county with more than three percent of its land outside of private ownership. (Sale: 34)

Clearly it is no coincidence that the most intense period of enclosure happened at the beginning of this civilization's most intense period of development and expansion, for industrial civilization would not have been possible without a captive workforce and captive consumers. The enclosures were not just a blatant transfer of land from the public weal to the British ruling class, they were a calculated attack on the self-sufficiency of the rural population with the express purpose of *creating* a working class, a class of wage slaves whose *survival* was dependent on their earning and spending a wage.

In *Change in the Village*, published in 1912, George Sturt wrote:

> *To the enclosure of the common more than to any other cause may be traced all the changes which have subsequently passed over the village. It was like knocking the keystone out of an arch. The keystone is not the arch; but once it is gone, all sorts of forces, previously resisted begin to operate towards ruin, and gradually the whole structure crumbles down.... The enclosure...left the people helpless against influences which have sapped away their interests, robbed them of security and peace, rendered their knowledge and skill of small value, and seriously affected their personal pride and their character.... When the cottager was cut off from his resources...there was little else that he could do in the old way. It was out of the question to obtain most of his supplies from his own handiwork: they had to be procured, ready-made from some other source. That source, I need hardly say, was a shop.* (Sale: 35)

Naturally, the destruction of rural communities, in order to reposition a population to where the capitalist economy needed them, was not exactly how arguments justifying enclosure were presented in public. Then, as now, justifications tended to be couched in the language of *progress*, of *modernization, efficiency* and *improvement*. However, not always did such rationalization veil what "progress" really meant:

> *Let us not be satisfied with the liberation of Egypt, or the subjugation of Malta, but let us subdue Finchley Common; let us conquer Hounslow Heath; let us compel Epping Forest to submit to the yoke of improvement.*
> - John Sinclair (*Ibid.*: 34)

Sinclair's language is clear enough: this was war, the subjugation of people and the land on which they lived. As for "liberation," as Silvia Federici notes in *Caliban and the Witch*, a history of women and reproduction during the transition to capitalism, "What was 'liberated' was capital, as the land was now 'free' to function as a means of accumulation and exploitation, rather than a means of subsistence. Liberated were the Landlords, who now could unload onto the workers most of the cost of their reproduction, giving them access to some means of subsistence only when directly

employed. When work would not be available or would not be sufficiently profitable...workers, instead, could be laid off and left to starve." (Federici: 75) That war was being waged upon them was not lost on the victims of enclosure. As one man reported to Arthur Young, an 18th-century writer on agriculture and economics, "Inclosure was worse than ten wars." (Sale: 35)

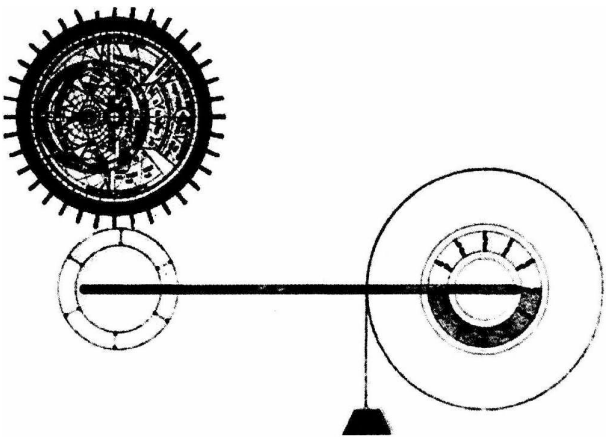
**Subsistence, Autarky, and Anarchy**

*The Savages produce to live, they do not live to produce.*
- Pierre Clastres

Living to produce is a kind of madness. The idea that "rational people in pursuit of their own self-interest" would dedicate the better part of their lives to the production and consumption of mostly unnecessary crap is irrational. Yet economists take this insane idea as the measure to which human activity is held.

That the word subsistence has come to be used in contemporary English almost exclusively as a thinly veiled slur connoting backwardness and dire poverty is due perhaps to the very notion of a subsistence life being at odds with the reigning ideology. Capitalist civilization cannot abide subsistence lifeways because subsistence lifeways are incompatible with capitalism, have no need for mass society, and are, therefore, obstacles in the path of civilization.

As anthropologist Pierre Clastres notes, the insistence on calling the economies of primitive societies "subsistence economies," has less to do with the general function of the production systems – after all, all economies are subsistence economies in that a crucial function of any society's production is to assure the subsistence of its members – and more to do with the manner by which the primitive economy fulfills its function. Economists, not finding in primitive people "the psychology of an industrial or commercial company head, concerned with ceaselessly increasing his production in order to increase his profit,



doltishly infer from this primitive economy's intrinsic inferiority." (Clastres, 2010: 193) Subsistence economies, producing no expropriable surplus, are viewed as economies of poverty, quaint throwbacks to an earlier stage of social development. But Clastres has it that "if primitive man is not an entrepreneur, it is because profit does not interest him; that if he does not optimize his activity...it is not because he does not know how to, but because he does not feel like it!" (*Ibid.*) Primitive society, then, is not awaiting the appropriate material and social conditions necessary to begin its advance to a more developed form of society (economic society) but *actively choosing* not to go down that path. For Clastres, primitive societies are societies that act *against* economy. They are *anti-productive*. They do not allow their means of survival to be linked to political power and thus, his further claim, they are also *societies against the State*. (Clastres 1989, 2010)

But what of us, born within a state apparatus, into a world of economic dependency and a life of work, whether we feel like it or not? If this is our great misfortune, then we are only compounding it daily through our acquiescence in the production and consumption of exchange value, the surplus beyond our needs: letting our lives, our relationships, our intellectual and physical efforts, be used to daily reproduce the civilization that enslaves us. What would it mean for us to live, not in servitude to, but *against* economy?

Slavery or subsistence is clearly what the Statecrafters and managers of civilization have believed our choice to be, for as we have seen, they have systematically worked to eliminate our ability to choose by dispossessing us from our land bases and undermining our broad skill sets through forced specialization. Nevertheless it remains, that if one does not want to be a slave, the alternative – that doesn't keep one bound to the economy and therefore contributing to the reproduction of the entire system of domination – is to head for the woods and take up a subsistence way of life.

As the recalibration of systems of control is a constant of civilized life, the dangers perceived by today's social engineers are not the same as those of the 18th or 19th centuries. To their minds those battles, particularly in the West, have long been won. In a world where almost everything has already been monetized, where it is believed that anything that can be monetized eventually will be monetized, where all the proposed "solutions" to our ecological and social problems are market-based, combined with the apparent acquiescence of nearly everyone, subsistence practices are no longer seen as the threat they once were: every thing and every activity will eventually be subsumed into the economy *anyway*.

Resistance to this system of slavery is expected (of course) and thus there are, as James Stephen recommended there should be, military, naval, police, and mercenary forces "so irresistible and so palpable as to repress whatever disposition to revolt may be manifested." States, and the corporations with which they are intertwined, prefer direct confrontation, for such confrontations they can easily win, having an overwhelming capacity for violent repression or recuperation through reform (recalibration). I would suggest then that focusing on evasion more than confrontation or interaction will likely present the more promising paths to both expanding one's personal freedom and to the creation of spaces where anarchic practices can be realized in concert with others. No, the totality of domination will not magically disappear with small groups of radicals abandoning the economy and exploring possible paths to uncivilization – for those groups of individuals, however, the eco-

nomy, that most oppressive mechanism of social control to which we are daily subjected, will have lost its power. This is to steal back ownership of one's life.

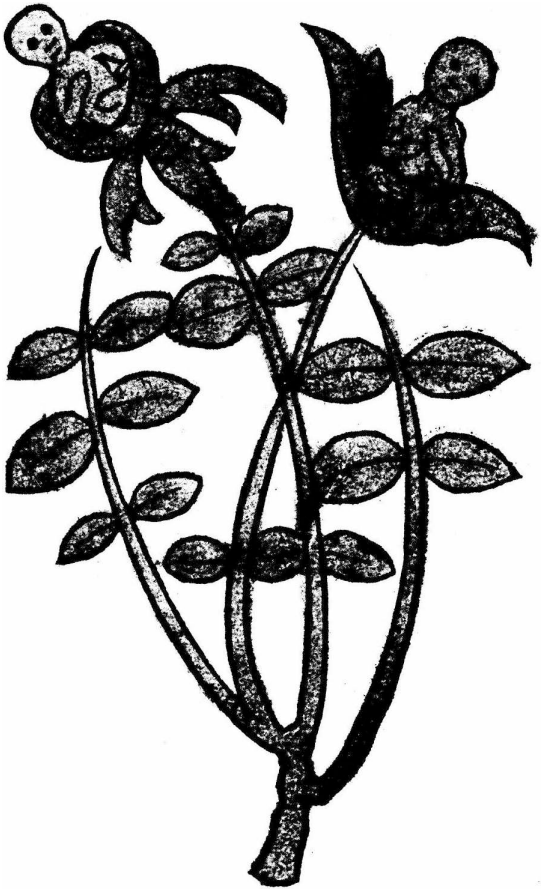
If, like I, you desire to reinhabit a green world full of self-willed plants and self-willed animals, then I would only say, that world is still there, go live in it! If you wish to cease being an economic unit kettled about in service to the economy, then look for some self-willed people with whom you can cooperate in the daily reproduction of autarky. Put your efforts into getting access to land – enough to support a subsistence autarky – and developing the skills, knowledge and wisdom needed to live anarchically with kin of your choosing. The solitary individual may wish to strike it out alone, and I wish them well, but I would suggest that if we are not merely to trade work for drudgery, cooperation with others will be a serious advantage if not an absolute necessity. The small-group then: large enough so that daily subsistence activities do not become *Work*, small enough to have face-to-face community, and thus, simple *anti-economic* organization or, "constituted disorganization" as Marshall Sahlins called this "species of anarchy." (Sahlins: 95)

This slave ship on which we sail is surely headed for some rough seas, and just as surely, the institutions and apparatuses of control that maintain ship discipline will try to keep the thing afloat by any means necessary. Industrial manufacturing, industrial scale "natural resource" extraction, industrial scale production of pollutants, remain the means by which the basic survival needs of the vast majority of people in our techno-industrial civilization are met, and which must be kept operational if the slaves are to be fed, clothed, housed, and distracted, and the parasites are to continue getting their fill. Sunk by rising seas, or ship-life under permanent state-of-emergency discipline...either way, the worst place to be is in the hold. But what really keeps us down in the hold is less its rigid structure than the belief that our dependency on that structure, *our inability* to survive without it, is for the time being, at least, inevitable.

While climate change-induced collapse or "financial meltdown" will severely curtail the destructive capacity of our species, we should not expect that it will give us a clean slate on which to create a "better world," for given how long we have been slaves subjugated by the State, it seems inevitable that something resembling a State and/or its apparatuses of control will quickly reemerge. That is, we will likely find ourselves still having to resist the attempts of authoritarians who want to put us to work.

It hardly needs saying that if the supermarket shelves start emptying out, being away from highly-concentrated populations of people, on land from which the necessities of your life can be procured, with the knowledge and skills needed to procure them, is clearly a preferable place to be. If, following some sort of collapse in the authority of the state, a new state apparatus rises from its ashes, not being dependent on it for survival will offer the more advantageous position for resisting the spread of authoritarian ways.

There are no models for us to follow, for our position is unique. The most inspiring stories we have all seem to come from other times and other places – even if we know something of the subsistence lifeways that were once practiced on the land on which we live, it is no longer the same place. If they are still practiced where we live, so much the better for us, and so much the better for those who still practice them. May they live long and prosper! Our own path out, however, we can only make ourselves.



**Notes**

1. I define authoritarian societies as any society that has a formal hierarchical structure through which authorities (self-appointed or elected) can compel subjects to follow their rule. In other words, we're not only talking North Korea or Belarus here but every society that has an organ of political power that claims authority over a population of people and has the ability to enforce this claim. By this definition it follows that all States constitute authoritarian societies but not that all authoritarian societies will necessarily assume State form.
2. Prior to the widespread use of money, taxation involved feeding the army, bureaucrats, and rulers directly from the State's expropriation of one's crops. This is one of the reasons states show a strong preference for sedentary agriculture: where crops are grown in monocultures in open fields and animals are raised *en masse* in open pastures or penned, harvest yields are easy to calculate for the purposes of taxation or confiscation.
3. "Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but six pence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides." - Benjamin Franklin.
   In 1855, summing up Franklin's philosophy, satirist Ferdinand Kürnberger said, "They make tallow out of cattle and money out of men." (Weber 1930: 49, 51)
4. Benjamin Franklin was to make a similar argument regarding slavery in the American colonies. In his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1755), Franklin posited that slave labor could never be as cheap as free labor in a densely populated country like England. (Davis 2015: 99)
5. Sir James Stephen (1789 – 1859): member of the British ruling class, abolitionist and Statecrafter. Stephen served in the colonial office from 1825 – 1847. Such was his influence that his colleague, Sir Henry Taylor opined that Stephen "literally ruled the colonial empire." It was Stephen who drew up the Slavery Abolition Act, passed in 1833.
6. Viscount Howick, Henry George Grey, 3rd Earl Grey (1802 – 1894): member of the British ruling class; early proponent of "free trade"; Statecrafter. Grey became a member of parliament in 1826, under the title Viscount Howick. In 1830 he became the Under Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. In 1835, his position changed to Secretary at War. In 1845,

following the death of his father he became Earl of Grey. By 1846, he was serving as colonial secretary. In 1848, despite having never visited the colony of Australia, Grey was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council as the representative for the city of Melbourne.

7. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786 – 1845): English Statecrafter, abolitionist and social reformer.
8. The need to force people into the market-place was well understood but not well advertised. As Michal Perelman points out, the classical political economists "placed their writings outlining the less attractive, coercive side of classical political economy in their less famous works, especially in their correspondence. In all likelihood, these early economists were not eager to advertise the harsh nature of the supposedly benign program they advocated....Later economists never acknowledged this crucial aspect of the work of their predecessors..." (Perelman: 44)
9. Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, 1st Baronet (1734 – 1835): member of the British ruling class; a Scottish politician and writer on finance and agriculture; a Statecrafter. Sinclair was an advocate of "scientific" agriculture and the modernization of farming techniques, and the first person to use the word *statistics* in the English language. He was instrumental in setting up the British Board of Agriculture and served as its first president from 1793 – 1798.
10. Kirkpatrick Sale, in *Rebels Against the Future*, his excellent history of the luddite uprising of 1811 – 1814, suggests that the practice of enclosure dates back to the 12th century. (Sale: 34) Other sources I have used generally place the first incarnation of the "enclosure movement" in the 15th century.

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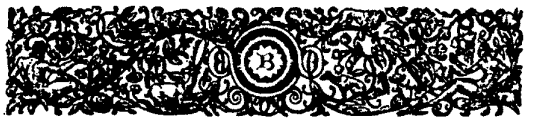
# Reviews

*The purpose of our journal is to foster communication among those with similar values, such that we may inspire one another, find opportunities for shared projectuality, and constructively critique each other's efforts. Actively being part of such a dialogue entails sincerely listening and responding to others, and thus in every issue of* Backwoods *we will conduct reviews of publications and books relevant to the anti-civilizational, anarchist, and permacultural milieux. We will feature both new and classical texts on subjects ranging from critical analyses of our crisis to how-to guides for practical techniques, from philosophy and the natural sciences to fiction and poetry.*

*If you would like to see a piece reviewed by the editors of* Backwoods, *send submissions to Box 238, Poestenkill, NY 12140.*



***In Search of the Masterless Men of Newfoundland***
Seaweed and Ron Sakolsky (Berkeley: Ardent Press/LBC Books, 2017)

In this recent offering from our friends at Little Black Cart Books, we have a little book containing one short and one long essay exploring the myth of the titular Masterless Men, a legendary group of 18th century outlaws reputedly founded by escaped Irish indentured servants who had been enslaved by the British colonial authorities to be fishermen in the New World. Their story persists in folklore to this day in poetry and music as well as in historical literature. As the book emphasizes, the historical veracity of the tales (there are varying versions) is hazy and controversial to the point that theories range from doubting the existence of the Masterless Men entirely to claims that their story is quite well-documented. The authors self-consciously embrace this amiguity, with Sakolsky noting that his effort aims at exploring how "historical and poetic facts can interact in a mutually reinforcing manner to create an inspirational anti-authoritarian saga."

I am grateful that the authors took it upon themselves to promote a story with which I feel great affinity. The Masterless Men were deserters in the strongest sense, escaping bondage in an immediate and nearly total way to pursue a life materially and psychically removed from the British colonial State. They reached out to those who were still in bondage and perhaps inspired others to seek liberation in doing so. They did not in any way kowtow to authority in a compromise for loosened bondage, nor did they feel the need to validate their freedom in an attempt to directly attack the State – they instead evaded, raided, and defied the colonial authorities, a form of conflict that was within their means.

On that note, I feel the need to point out what seems to me to be a curious theoretical inconsistency in the case of one of the authors. Seaweed's contribution is a mild revision of an essay previously published in his collection *Land and Freedom* (Black Powder Press, 2013; previously published in *Green Anarchy* #24, Spring/Summer

2007), in which he outlines a number of themes on the praxis of "insurrectionary subsistence", a kind of fusion between insurrectionary anarchism and "organically self-organized subsistence movements." The over-arching theme of Seaweed's book is that – to use our words – human reinhabitation and autarky are necessary for the success of attack against civilization and vice-versa. Seaweed makes it clear that for him, as for most anarchists, desertion, in itself, is insufficient – social revolution is necessary.

The inclusion in his *Land and Freedom* of "The Society of the Masterless Men" thus struck me as an oddity. I wonder why he writes that the story of the Masterless Men is "exceptionally inspiring because they succeeded", when, according to his own metric, they really had not. The Masterless Men were not agitating for revolution in Ferryland, Newfoundland, much less trying to overthrow the British Empire. Their raids appear to have been more subsistence-based in motivation, efforts at desertion from a slave lifeway akin to modern-day theft, scamming, and other evasions. When State forces came repeatedly to root them out, the Masterless Men did not stay to fight – they ran and hid, repeatedly. Their metric for success was not overthrowing the forces of order, it was taking back their lives. Seaweed makes it very clear that he thinks this is insufficient in his other Land and Freedom essays, yet he does not rebuke the Masterless Men for this in even one sentence. Does this inconsistency perhaps reflect an ambivalence within Seaweed himself?

Interestingly, Sakolsky's support for the Masterless Men is unequivocal. He not only pushes against an effort at authoritarian revisionism of their story, but also defends the bandit/dropout lifeway from criticism of that praxis (in general, not of the Masterless Men in particular) coming from famed Marxist academic Eric Hobsbawm. Refuting this strain of all-or-nothing politics of despair is much needed and, for me, always appreciated.

My only major criticism of the text is that I was left a bit unclear on the overall historical veracity of the Masterless Men tale and exactly where the controversy lies. The particular issues of controversy and weighing of evidence are never spelled out plainly. In some places, it is clear that what is being suggested is only speculation, but other events – such as those that he quotes from amateur historians Dawe and Fardy – imply some level of verifiable fact, facts whose truth would seem to guarantee that at least something very like the tale genuinely happened. The empirically-minded reader, who might have been hoping to weigh the available evidence their self, may thus be a bit disappointed. Given that Sakolsky is self-consciously exploring a rebellious myth, however, his ambiguity in presentation may be deliberate, as his refusal to venture a straightforward yea or neigh regarding the existence of the Masterless Men plainly is.

Ultimately, Seaweed and Sakolsky have penned a worthwhile book on the power of myth. Although myth has been used time and again to construct slave ideologies, the stories we tell ourselves can also be a wellspring for ethics of refusal, dignity, and self-ownership. I agree with Sakolsky's lovely closing remark that the story of the Masterless Men is "a fluid and impassioned call for an emancipatory re-imagining and poetic transformation of reality in the anarchic context of land and freedom."

*- Bellamy Fitzpatrick*

***Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How***
Theodore John Kaczynski
(Scottsdale, AZ: Fitch & Madison, 2016)

It would have been *cool* (I thought) to open my review of this book by saying, "I agree with the Unabomber" – but having now finished reading the book I fear I can't rise to such a flippant attitude. It would have been amusing to *épater les biens pensants*, across the whole political spectrum, with such a quip, but I can't honestly do it.

I do agree with Kaczynski that an "anti-tech revolution" (or something of the sort) should be the top priority for human action here and now, and I even agree that it should take precedence over such causes as "radical environmentalism" and "anarcho-primitivism." But I fear that *this book* is not the text we need to clarify such thinking. For a start, it fails adequately to define *technology*, *anti-technology*, or *revolution* – and it has nothing to say about *why* or *how*. Even so, I believe all anti-technologists, anti-civilizationists, green anarchists, luddites, and (in general) critics of the tyrannical "Information Ontology" and technopathocracy of our era should read this book – if only because it makes one clear assertion that needs to be considered – namely that technology *in itself* is evil and must be overcome.

K is correct, I believe, in his claim that any reform or ameliorization of tech and its culture would prove futile at this (too) Late stage of Civilization, and that technology cannot be used to overcome technology. At one point, however, he contradicts himself, it would seem, by asserting that the Internet can be used as a tool by the anti-tech revolution. Hasn't the Internet *already* "corrupted" – to use K's favorite term of abuse – most potential for resistance in our post-Social world? Nothing important can be accomplished, I suspect, without renunciation of "social media" and perhaps even literal luddite machine-smashing – even if this means going back to messenger pigeons!

I appreciate (and have myself been pushing for years) the idea of *strategy* over *mere* tactics in this struggle against the Totality; I like the way K uses the word "victory" without embarrassment. The post-modern disdain for grand strategies as essentialist and hegemonic must be dumped. The time for Baudrillardian subtlety and Deleuzian "nomadism" is (sadly, I would say) long past the sell-by date. The battle for the World and Life vs. the Matrix and Death is a zero-sum affair. Too bad.

But unlike K, I do not believe we can take the structure of strategy as a given. We cannot assume that the world – or even a tiny self-chosen elite – is ready to understand intuitively the need for some supra-Clauswitzian strategic revolution without first establishing a thorough (indeed, terminal) *critique of technology*.

For this reason I was disappointed by K's sneering dismissal of virtually all other critics of tech as a "useless bunch" – including Arne Naess, Chellis Glendinning, Daniel Quinn, Bill McKibben, Ivan Illich, and even John Zerzan (who went out on a limb to defend the Unabomber, back in the day) – simply because they fall short of providing a flawless blueprint for anti-tech revolution – which K himself also fails to do. He slags the anarchists (correctly) for wasting precious energy on sectarian squabbles instead of getting down to basics – but then he creates his own sect, with himself as the 10,000th Pope, and excommunicates all the other Popes. In this he seems to be imitating Lenin, whom he admires as a "successful revolutionary" – ignoring the fact that 70 years is not a very impressive track record. *There are no successful revolutions*. Too bad. But there do exist a few brilliant critiques of technology – starting with Nedd Ludd. As Nietzsche said – philosophy with a hammer.

In general, K seems to admire Bolshevik tactics (not ideology) above all, to the extent of recommending classical commie *Entrism* in the style of the old International and its "fronts"; for instance: infiltrate McKibben's organization and

bore from within!

If K's strategy remains vague, it's not at all clear what his tactics would consist of. At one point he speaks of "legal" revolution as opposed to "illegal" revolution, which he appears to abjure. What exactly would a "legal" revolution be? Is this just K's ploy to avoid further condemnation for his best-known tactic – the bombing assassination of individual technocrats and "innovators"? K has admirers in Mexico who are currently doing precisely that. Does he reject their homage? This is puzzling.

Although I appreciate K's emphasis on action and single-minded "extremism in the defense of liberty" (to hijack the late Karl Hess's famous slogan for Barry Goldwater), I must state here that History has not inspired me to trust in Bolshevik-style vanguardism. As an anarchist, I would still favor the spontaneous insurrection over the planned revolution. I'm not convinced that violence would be useful – but then, K doesn't actually advocate violence here. As I said, he leaves us in the dark when it comes to an actual definition of "anti-tech revolution." Can we imagine a non-violent *uprising* that would involve literal machine-smashing and *reversion* to life-positive *techné* over technology? Well, anyway, thanks to the Unabomber for a stimulating reading experience.

*– Peter Lamborn Wilson*

***Permaculture: Practical Solutions Beyond Sustainability***
No. 1, Summer 2016. (North American edition)

This magazine is the very first issue of the North American edition of the longstanding *Permaculture* journal of the United Kingdom, and one may thus reasonably expect that the new editors would view their flagship issue as a chance to clearly express their overall ethos. Unfortunately, this ethos is precisely what we at *Backwoods* reject in the current U.S. permaculture subculture. What follows is a harsh critique, but I hope it will be taken in good faith by the editors and authors of *Permaculture*, as my sincere intent is to sharpen theory, banish harmful illusions, and invite dialogue in a mutually beneficial exchange.

In the opening editorial page, the editors give their credo, essentially a revision of the popularized permaculture ethics: "Permaculture is a way of looking at life and the inherent connections between all beings. It is based on how nature operates, the ways of indigenous people, and incorporates [*sic*] modern technologies when needed. Three core ethics guide its [*sic*] path: Caring for the planet, its inhabitants, and celebrating [*sic*] and sharing the abundance that comes from a permaculture way of living." While I feel great affinity with the general ideas of an holistic worldview and the appreciation of wisdom in traditional lifeways, I cannot abide by the simplistic, only softly critical notion of employing "modern" technologies "when needed". Besides being open-ended and subjective to the point of near-meaninglessness (one might very well say glyphosate is "needed", as, unfortunately, many who take a strongly anti-"invasive species" stance do), it completely sidesteps any deeper analysis of the way in which new technologies are culturally foisted on the population so as to artificially become indispensable: just as no one "needed" cars until the whole geographical layout of society was built around them, no one needs industrial machinery to feed themselves except because of the present social conditions. As ecological radicals, we need a more theoretically-developed permacultural critique of the role of industrial technology in the milieu and the wider world, and I urge the editors of *Permaculture* to consider a future issue with just such a theme.

Above the ethical statement is a small photo of unspecified "Indigenous women" gathering unspecified "berries", which reads as an exotifying endorsement of an ill-defined *indigeneity*. There have been numerous indigenous cultures living in a wide variety of ways. Some were freedom-loving, and some were enslaving; some lived harmoniously with their ecology, and some damaged their ecosystems – romantic images of undefined indigenous people doing something that evokes a vague image of the pristine primitive without any kind of discussion or context is obscurantist, not truly reverent of a reinhabiting way of life.

What disturbed me the most, however, is the first proper article of the issue, "Scaling up Permaculture" by Erik Ohlsen of the Permaculture Skills Center in Sebastopol, California. Ohlsen aims to examine "how permaculture can better root itself in society", by which he means mainstreaming permaculture through funding and collaboration with the State, corporations, and unspecified "institutions," presumably NGOs. Ohlsen's call sounds far too much like the usual refrain of the broad, moderate Left, whose adherents seek to channel all discontent and rebellious efforts into either incremental, piecemeal reform within the legal system or toward shifting popular consumer choices. Often among such adherents – and Ohlsen is no exception – we are dealt an argument with the pernicious premise that all social malcontents are, whether they realize it or not, somehow *really* on the same side as the broad Left when it comes to values and goals, and that we are therefore *all in this together* and ought to cooperate. This often implicit premise is not only false but dangerous, an effort at quelling abandonment of the ecocidal, parasitic State in order to ostensibly make the cancer benign.

Ohlsen draws a distinction between "permaculture elders" – those involved in the early days of permaculture, among whom there was a strong drop-out ethos – whom he portrays as stuck in their ways and unwilling to take on his ostensibly pragmatic program, contrasting this irksomeness with the younger generation who want to follow his lead and "run with [permaculture] into the rest of the world." Pleased with this change, Ohlsen thus appears unaware of how the generational gap he is observing is symptomatic of a well-documented general tendency among Millennials to be, in comparison to past generations, more submissive to authority, less passionate, more materially avaricious, more narcissistic, less empathetic [We will examine this phenomenon of generational decay in future issues of this journal, though it is touched on very briefly in "An Invitation to Desertion"] – in other words, just the sort of people he is looking for, those who "accept the confines of an economic system that is controlled by money".

Ohlsen would likely consign me to his wastebin taxon of those "with a pure and somewhat idealistic view of the world" (actually hyperpessimistic in my case, but close enough), whom he views as obstacles to real social change, contrasing them with his supposedly hardboiled realist view that recognizes that "the reality of scaling up sustainability absolutely requires we work with institutions, companies, and governments." My reply to Ohlsen is that what he describes has been done by people like him *ad nauseam*, that the history of civilizations has been in part a history of reform – yet, as is outlined in this issue's essays, the basic problems of civilization have stayed constant, only increasing in their virulence as the human capacity for destruction and immiseration has been exacerbated by their greater population and technological capacities. There is thus little that is more idealistic than believing that the ten millennia of civilizations that have awlays enslaved, warred, and denuded land can be reformed into an ecologically-benign society through green capitalism and good governance, reform which Ohlsen, astoundingly, believes can happen in "the next to 10-15 years." I submit that this is messianic fantasy, a refusal to make a basic inductive inference for which there is

ten thousand years of evidence.

I hope the editors and writers of *Permaculture* will see our side of things and consider moving beyond these capitalist reformist politics. The problems created by the present paradigm are inherent in its fundamental structure; they cannot be solved within it, but only by exiting it. We welcome any dialogue with the writers or editors of *Permaculture*, whether they find my critique to be well-placed or ill-founded.

*- Bellamy Fitzpatrick*

***Permaculture Design: Regenerating Life Together.*** November/Winter 2017, No. 106.

Some of us at *Backwoods* have read and appreciated this magazine for fifteen years, as it has often featured great content. We have also noticed, however, that the change in title (from *Permaculture Activist*) and editorship has been accompanied by a change in tone and content. Many issues – this one being no exception – now feature social justice ideology, New Age spiritualism, and other influences not present in the earlier incarnation of the journal, nor, indeed, in the earlier days of permaculture.

This issue stayed true to its earlier legacy by featuring a few practically-minded articles of varying quality – Robert Kourik's piece on companion planting stands out as commendable: concise, relevant, and empirically-grounded. But much of the journal is more culturally, ethically, and politically focused, and on this terrain we find disagreement. I hope that my critique fosters dialogue rather than squelches the possibility of it on the basis of the perception of irreconcilable differences in values – I welcome the possibility of debate in the case of disagreement.

I was glad to see in Laura Killingbeck's "Keeping it Real" a critique of Internet culture and social media, and I agree with her that engagement with such media necessitates a regularly revisited self-critical process of examining its true consequences in one's life and praxis. I wish, however, that she had pushed the point further: she is correct to note that we all must choose dearly each day how to engage with technological media; but we must also, in doing so, keep in mind and communicate to others that using these media is at best a necessary evil, at worst a harmful addiction, and in either case cannot be imagined as part of a liberated future. The continued existence of the biocidal industrialized global economy that creates and maintains the Internet and its assorted gadgets could never be part of a thoroughgoing permaculture ethos, which is necessarily Luddite.

The most explicitly political piece is an excerpt from the book *Principles of a Pluralist Commonwealth* by longtime Left-wing luminary Gar Alperovitz. Alperovitz's inclusion by the editors may be taken as an indication of their broader political views. If that is the case, I am glad to see that they, in invoking Alperovitz, at least recognize that neoliberalism is antithetical to a permaculture project in even its broadest and most diluted sense.

But just what is Alperovitz, and perhaps therefore the editorship of this journal, *for*, politically? He aims at "a next system beyond traditional capitalism and traditional socialism", and he is quick to condemn the, "20th century alternative [to capitalism], state socialism", as a "total failure". He goes on to repeatedly, almost obsessively profess that the Pluralist Commonwealth would be democratic, speaking of "genuine democracy" and "real democracy" without ever offering any positive definition of just what "democracy" is, nor giving any sense of how one might distinguish between the supposedly *genuine* and *real*

Alperovitzian democracy as opposed to the apparently fake forms. Rather than aiming for clarity, the argument is made via a rhetorical bludgeoning of near-meaningless democracisms, as when he writes,

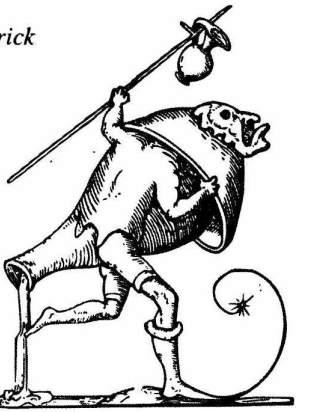
> *"It is impossible to nurture genuine local democracy and democratic experience unless there is sufficient local stability over time to allow the development of a culture of democracy. And without a culture of democracy grounded in local institutions and practices, genuine democracy in the system as a whole is likely to be hollow."*

Alperovitz likely never defines *democracy* because he and his readership are likely to unquestioningly regard it as a placeholder for *freedom*, or, more reductively, *the Good*. I submit that democracy's supposed ethical paramountcy is nothing more or less than a sacred cow, a bit of undertheorized American mythos that the charade of choosing one's masters makes one free. A thoroughgoing critique of democracy is beyond the scope of this short review, so I will keep my remarks brief while noting that some excellent anarchist ones have been made. (See, for instance, 'Debunking Democracy,' by Bob Black, available on theanarchistlibrary.org.) Our democratic republic is precisely part of our repression, and not some partial freedom: our political power consists of a mathematically insignificant vote among predetermined and highly similar candidates, and our hallowed right to protest is nothing but a right to beg and moan in the street under the close watch of armed guards. Democracy is not even a good decision-making mechanism, but only a ritualized, pacified form of mob rule in which might, represented as numbers, makes right.

Moreover, although Alperovitz offered a perfunctory condmenation of state socialism at the beginning of his piece, it is difficult to read his proposal as anything but a thin variation on this theme, somehow cleansed and sanctified in his mind by his "genuine democracy". He describes his vision of economic organization as being based on "community-wide, neighborhood-encompassing [...] non-profit corporation[s]" at the local level paired with "some form of planning [...] at the national level." Alperovitz makes it very clear that he thinks this large-scale organization is necessary, but, again here as with "democracy" before, he does not say quite what it would be, only that it would be "sufficiently robust" (read: sufficiently invested with State authority, surveillance, and coercive powers) to manage either a national economy or a network of regional economies in a large nation. He does not want to say that it would obviously be a national bureaucracy because that would sound awfully like state socialism, which, he already acknowledged, was "a total failure". Would the horrors of Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism have gone differently with the advent of the sham elections of democracy?

If the true goal of permaculture is, according to the journal's subtitle, *"Regenerating Life Together,"* I suggest that industrial technology, democracy, and bureaucracy only lie in the way. I invite the editors and writers of *Permaculture Design* to engage with us on what we see as a crucial issue for the North American permaculture milieu to discuss and resolve.

*- Bellamy Fitzpatrick*



# AGAINST SUSTAINABILITY

Recently I've found myself wishing -- when I hear the word "sustainability" -- that I had a revolver to reach for. "Sustainability" has become a coded mask for a cause I detest -- the salvation of Capitalism. Obviously, Too-Late Kapital is running down the road to "global" ragnarok, & has been doing so since the great take-off of the Technopathocracy in about 1830 (when, according to H.G. Wells, "the first superfluous human was born") -- i.e., the Industrial Revolution, the triumph of the Machine over Nature. Nietzsche dated the birth of the Terminal Human to about this same date; so the first shall be the last.

The whole point of sustainability is to save cars, but re-design them to run on sunshine or salad oil -- to save highways, parking lots, jet planes, suburban lawns, bourgeois yuppie liberal smug self-satisfaction & "first world" entitlement -- but to transform them all into something beige, crunchy, "ecological", "organic", smiley-faced, goodygoody -- and to go on like this forever -- "sustainably". To avoid the Fall, even if it means abandoning huge swathes of the human race & its habitat, so as to salvage the part that counts -- US -- or to put it another way, U.S. (of A.). To escape to Mars with Mr Musk in a driverless spaceship "shared" by other billionaires, & fuck all hoi polloi & their degraded junkfood "lifestyle".

Solar power & wind power, the panacea of sustainability, are themselves sources of vast hellscapes of aesthetic filth & poisonous pollution -- the factories (in Mexico, of course) to produce those ubiquitous alien-gray panels & war-of-the-world-style windmills (impervious to any poor Don Quixote) -- to cover the deserts with black glass, the seas with whining avicidal behemoths -- so that WE can go on enjoying our horrid health-food, our idiotic i-phones, our crapulous computers, our tedious televisions -- not to mention our armies & police forces, our bureaucrats, politicians, lawyers, silicon-valley "disruptors" & all the other parasites & oppressor-class scumbags who take but never give.

Forget sustainability. Forget efficiency. Efficiency is the devil's shit. Fuck "green capitalism" & its neat corporate cornucopia of consumer garbage & badly-designed "designer" crapola. Technology will not solve the "problems" that technology created in the first place, any more than heroin will cure morphine addiction, or arsenic will save you from arsenic poisoning. The only way to free ourselves from the rule of sick machines is to smash the machines. The Luddites saw the light already in 1812. A sledgehammer is the sole solution.

# Backwoods No. 1 Spring 2018

*We indict the Civilization of Leviathan as a truly insane way of life predicated on the creation of States to enforce the enslavement of the many so that the parasitic few may acquire absurd wealth and influence. Such social relations are poisonous to all involved, being based on venality and coercion, ridiculous commodity fetishism, and the death of real human community through domination and atomization.*

*We refuse the techno-industrial logic that treats the beautiful tapestry of the living world as just so much grist for the mill, as an unliving "resource" to be "developed" - that is, to be endlessly plundered and paved, extirpated of life, and replaced by parking lots, factory farms, waste dumps, extraction sites, and our apartment complexes and offices that fittingly resemble battery cages.*

*We champion anarchy: the freedom that comes from conscious self-ownership and voluntary relations of mutuality with our human and nonhuman kin in small, autarkic, face-to-face communities based in a regenerative relationship with the land and the whole of the nonhuman world.*

*We embrace the vivacity that comes from deeply ecologically harmonious ways of life and the sense of place, presence, and fulfillment that comes from nourishing and being nourished by an enveloping, living world full of consciousness and agency.*